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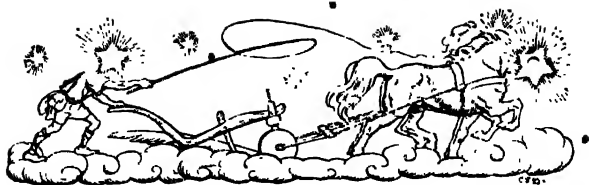
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# ALPHA OF THE PLOUGH

## ON LETTER-WRITING

Two soldiers, evidently brothers, stood at the door of the railway carriage—one inside the compartment, the other on the platform.

"Now, you won't forget to write, Bill," said the latter.

"No," said Bill. "I shall be back at --- to-night, and I'll write all round to-morrow. But, lor, what a job. There's mother and the missus and Bob and Sarah and Aunt Jane and Uncle Jim, and—well, you know the lot. You've had to do it, Sam."

"Yes," said Sam, ruefully; "it's a fair teaser."

"And if you write to one and miss another they're offended," continued Bill. "But I always mention all of 'em. I say 'love to Sarah,' and 'hope Aunt Jane's cold's better,' and that sort of thing, and that fills out a page. But I'm blowed if I can find anything else to say. I just begin 'hoping this finds you well, as it leaves me at present,' and then I'm done. What else is there to say?"

"Nothing," said Sam, mournfully. "I just sit and

scratch my head over the blessed paper, but nothing'll come. Seems as though my head's as empty as a drum."

" "Same here. 'Tisn't like writing love-letters. When I was up to that game 'twas easy enough. When I got stuck I just put in half a page of crosses, and that filled up fine. But writing to mother and the missus and Sarah and Jim and the rest is different. You can't fill up with crosses. It would look ridiklus."

"It would," said Sam.

Then the train began to move, and the soldier inside sank back on his seat, took out a cigarette, and began to smoke. I found he had been twice out at the front, and was now home on sick leave. He had been at the battle of Mons, through the retreat to the Marne, the advance to the Aisne, the first battle of Ypres, and the fighting at I'estubert. In a word, he had seen some of the greatest events in the world's history, face to face, and yet he confessed that when he came to write a letter, even to his wife, he could find nothing to say. He was in the position of the lady mentioned by Horace Walpole, whose letter to her husband began and ended thus: "I write to you because I have nothing to do: I finish because I have nothing to say."

I suppose there has never been so much letter-writing in the world as is going on to-day, and much of it is good writing, as the papers show. But the case of my companion in the train is the case of thousands and tens of thousands of young fellows who for the first time in their lives want to write

and discover that they have no gift of self-expression. It is not that they are stupid. It is that somehow the act of writing paralyses them. They cannot condense the atmosphere in which they live to the concrete word. You have to draw them out. They need a friendly lead. When they have got that they can talk well enough, but without it they are dumb.

In the great sense letter-writing is no doubt a lost art. It was killed by the penny post and modern hurry. When Madame de Sévigné, Cowper, Horace Walpole, Byron, Lamb, and the Carlyles wrote their immortal letters the world was a leisurely place where there was time to indulge in the luxury of writing to your friends. And the cost of franking a letter made that letter a serious affair. If you could only send a letter once in a month or six months, and then at heavy expense, it became a matter of first-rate consequence. The poor, of course, couldn't enjoy the luxury of letter-writing at all. De Quincey tells us how the dalesmen of Lakeland a century ago used to dodge the postal charges. The letter that came by stage coach was received at the door by the poor mother, who glanced at the superscription, saw from a certain agreed sign on it that Tom or Jim was well, and handed it back to the carrier unopened. In those days a letter was an event.

Now when you can send a letter half round the globe for a penny, and when the postman calls half a dozen times a day, few of us take letter-writing seriously. Carlyle saw that the advent of the penny post would kill the letter by making it cheap. "I



shall send a penny letter next time,<sup>v</sup> he wrote to his mother when the cheap postage was about to come in, and he foretold that people would not bother to write good letters when they could send them for next to nothing. He was right, and the telegraph, the telephone, and the typewriter have completed the destruction of the art of letter-writing. It is the difficulty or the scarcity of a thing that makes it treasured. If diamonds were as plentiful as pebbles we shouldn't stoop to pick them up.

But the case of Bill and Sam and thousands of their comrades to-day is different. They don't want to write literary letters, but they do want to tell the folks at home something about their life and the great things of which they are a part. But the great things are too great for them. They cannot put them into words. And they ought not to try, for the secret of letter-writing is intimate triviality. Bill could not have described the retreat from Mons; but he could have told, as he told me, about the blister he got on his heel, how he hungered for a smoke, how he marched and marched until he fell asleep marching, how he lost his pal at Le Cateau, and how his boot sole dropped off at Meaux. And through such trivialities he would have given a living picture of the great retreat.

In short, to write a good letter you must approach the job in the lightest and most casual way. You must be personal, not abstract. You must not say, "This is too small a thing to put down." You must say, "This is just the sort of small thing we talk

about at home. If I tell them this they will see me, as it were, they'll hear my voice, they'll know what I'm about." That is the purpose of a letter. Carlyle had the trick to perfection. He is writing from Scotland to his brother Alec in Canada, and he begins talking about his mother. "Good old Mother," he says, "she is even now sitting at my back, trying at another table to write you a small word with her own hand; the first time she has tried such a thing for a year past. It is Saturday night, after dark; we are in the east room in a hard, dry evening with a bright fire to ourselves two; Jenny and her bairns are 'scouring up things' in the other end of the house; and below stairs the winter operations of the farm go on, in a subdued tone: you can conceive the scene!" How simple it is and yet how perfect. Cannot you see Alec reading it in his far-off home and his eyes moistening at the picture of his old mother sitting and writing her last message to him on earth?

Keats expresses the idea very well in one of those voluminous letters which he wrote to his brother George and his wife in America and in which he poured out the wealth of family affection which was one of the most amiable features of his character. He has described how he had been to see his mother, how she had laughed at his bad jokes, how they went out to tea at Mrs. Millar's, and how in going they were struck with the light and shade through the gateway at the Horse Guards. And he goes on: "I intend to write you such volumes that it will be impossible for me to keep any order or method in

what I write; that will come first which is uppermost in my mind, not that which is uppermost in my heart—besides I should wish to give you a picture of our lives here whenever by a touch I can do it; even as you must see by the last sentence our walk past Whitehall all in good health and spirits—this I am certain of because I felt so much pleasure from the simple idea of your playing a game of cricket.”

There is the recipe by one of the masters of the craft. A letter written in this vein annihilates distance; it continues the personal gossip, the intimate communion, that has been interrupted by separation; it preserves one's presence in absence. It cannot be too simple, too commonplace, too colloquial. Its familiarity is not its weakness, but its supreme virtue. If it attempts to be orderly and stately and elaborate, it may be a good essay, but it will certainly be a bad letter.

### ON PLEASANT SOUNDS

THE wind had dropped, and on the hillside one seemed to be in a vast and soundless universe. Far down in the valley a few lights glimmered in the general darkness, but apart from these one might have fancied oneself alone in all the world. Then from some remote farmstead there came the sound of a dog barking. It rang through the night like the

distant shout of a friend. It seemed to fill the whole arch of heaven with its reverberations and to flood the valley with the sense of companionship. It brought me news from the farm. The day's tasks were over, the cattle were settled for the night, the household were at their evening meal, and the watch-dog had resumed his nocturnal charge. His bark seemed to have in it the music of immemorial things – of labour and rest, and all the cheerful routine and comradeship of the fields.

It is only in the country that one enjoys the poetry of natural sounds. A dog barking in a suburban street is merely a disturber of the peace, and I know of nothing more forlorn than the singing of a caged bird in, let us say, Tottenham Court Road. Wordsworth's Poor Susan found a note of enchantment in the song of the thrush that sang at the corner of Wood Street, off Cheapside. But it was only an enchantment that passed into deeper sadness as the vision of the green pastures which it summoned up faded into the drab reality:

. . . they fade,

The mist and the river, the hill and the shade:

The stream will not flow and the hill will not rise,

And the colours have all passed away from her eyes.

There is something in the life of towns which seems to make the voices of the country alien and sorrowful. They are lost in the tumult, and, if heard, sound only like a reproach against a fretful world, an echo from some Eden from which we have been exiled.

In the large silence of the countryside sounds have a significance and intimacy that they cannot have where life is crowded with activities and interests. In a certain sense life here is richer because of its poverty—because of its freedom from the thousand distractions that exhaust its emotion and scatter its energies. Because we have little we discover much in that little.

Take the sound of church bells. In the city it is hardly more pleasing than the song of the bird in Tottenham Court Road. It does not raise my spirits, it only depresses them. But when I heard the sound of the bells come up from the valley last evening, it seemed like the bringer of a personal message of good tidings. It had in it the rapture of a thousand memories—memories of summer eves and snowy landscapes, of vanished faces and forgotten scenes. It was at once stimulating and calming, and spoke somehow the language of enduring and incommunicable things.

It is, I suppose, the associations of sounds rather than their actual quality which make them pleasant or unpleasant. The twitter of sparrows is, in itself, as prosaic a sound as there is in nature, but I never hear it on waking without a feeling of inward peace. It seems to link me with some incredibly remote and golden morning, and with a child in a cradle waking for the first time to light and sound and consciousness.

And so with that engaging ruffian of the feathered world, the rook. It has no more music in its voice than a tin kettle; but what jollier sound is there on a late February morning than the splendid hubbub

of a rookery when the slovenly nests are being built in the naked and swaying branches of the elms? Betsy Trotwood was angry with David Copperfield's father because he called his house Blunderstone Rookery. "Rookery, indeed!" she said. It is almost the only point of disagreement I have with that admirable woman. Not to love a rookery is *prima facie* evidence against you. I have heard of men who have bought estates because of the rookery, and I have loved them for their beautiful extravagance. I am sure I should have liked David Copperfield's father from that solitary incident recorded of him. He was not a very practical or business-like man, I fear; but people who love rookeries rarely are. You cannot expect both the prose and the poetry of life for your endowment.

How much the feeling created by sound depends upon the setting may be illustrated by the bagpipes. The bagpipes in a London street is a thing for ribald laughter, but the bagpipes in a Highland glen is a thing to stir the blood, and make the mind thrill to memories of

Old, unhappy, far-off things,  
And battles long ago.

It is so even with the humble concertina. That instrument is to me the last expression of musical depravity. It is the torture which Dante would provide for me in the lowest circle of Hell. But the sound of a concertina on a country road on a dark night is as cheerful a noise as I want to hear.

But just as Omar loved the sound of a *distant* drum, so distance is an essential part of the enchantment of my concertina.

\* And of all pleasant sounds what is there to excel the music of the hammer and the anvil in the smithy at the entrance to the village? No wonder the children love to stand at the open door and see the burning sparks that fly and hear the bellows roar. I would stand at the open door myself if I had the pluck, for I am as much a child as any one when the hammer and the anvil are playing their primeval music. It is the oldest song of humanity played with the most ancient instruments. Here we are at the very beginning of our story—here we stand in the very dawn of things. What lineage so noble as that of the smith? What task so ancient and so honourable? With such tools the first smith smote music out of labour, and began the conquest of things to the accompaniment of joyous sounds. In those sounds I seem to hear the whole burden of the ages.

I think I will take another stroll down to the village. It will take me past the smithy.

### ON TALKING TO ONE'S SELF

I WAS at dinner at a well-known restaurant the other evening when I became aware that someone sitting alone at a table near by was engaged in an exciting conversation with himself. As he bent over his plate

his face was contorted with emotion, apparently intense anger, and he talked with furious energy, only pausing briefly in the intervals of actual mastication. Many glances were turned covertly upon him, but he seemed wholly unconscious of them, and, so far as I could judge, he was unaware that he was doing anything abnormal. In repose his face was that of an ordinary business man, sane and self-controlled, and when he rose to go his agitation was over, and he looked like a man who had won his point.

It is probable that this habit of talking to one's self has a less sinister meaning than it superficially suggests. It may be due simply to the energy of one's thought and to a concentration of mind that completely shuts out the external world. In the case I have mentioned it was clear that the man was temporarily detached from all his surroundings, that he was so absorbed by his subject that his eyes had ceased to see and his ears to hear. He was alone with himself, or perhaps with his adversary, and he only came back to the present with the end of his dinner and the paying of his bill. He was like a man who had emerged from another state of consciousness, from a waking sleep filled with tumultuous dreams. Obviously he was unaware that he had been haranguing the room in quite an audible voice for half an hour, and I daresay that if he were told that he had the habit of talking to himself he would deny it as passionately as you (or I) would deny that you (or I) snore in our sleep. And he would deny it for precisely the same reason. He doesn't know.



And here a dreadful thought assails me. What if I talk to myself, too? What if, like this man, I get so absorbed in the drama of my own mind that I cannot hear my own tongue going nineteen to the dozen? It is a disquieting idea. A strong conviction to the contrary, I see, amounts to nothing. This man, doubtless, had a strong conviction to the contrary—probably expressed an amused interest in anyone talking to himself as he passed him in the street. And the fact that my friends have never told me of the failing goes for nothing also. They may think I like to talk to myself. More probably, they may know that I do not like to hear of my failings. I must watch myself. But, no, that won't do. I might as well say I would watch my dreams and keep them in check. How can the conscious state keep an eye on the unconscious? If I do not know that I am talking how can I stop myself talking?

Ah, happy thought. I recall occasions when I have talked to myself, and have been quite conscious of the sound of my voice. They have been remarks I have made on the golf links—brief, emphatic remarks dealing with the perversity of golf clubs and the sullen intractability of golf balls. Those remarks I have heard distinctly, and at the sound of them I have come to myself with a shock, and have even looked round to see whether the lady in the red jacket playing at the next hole was likely to have heard me or (still worse) to have seen me.

I think this is evidence conclusive, for the man who talks to himself habitually never hears himself.

His words are only the echo of his thoughts, and they correspond so perfectly that, like a chord in music, there is no dissonance. It was thus with the art student I saw copying a picture at the Tate Gallery. "Ah, a little more blue," he said, as he turned from the original to his own canvas, and a little later: "Yes, that line wants better drawing." Several people stood by watching his work and smiling at his uttered thoughts. He alone was unconscious that he had spoken.

There are, it is true, cases in which the conscious and unconscious states seem to mingle—in which the intentional word and the unintentional come out almost in the same breath. It was so with Thomas Landseer, the father of Sir Edwin. He was one day visiting an artist, and inspecting his work. "Ah, very nice, indeed!" he said to his friend. "Excellent colour, excellent!" Then, as if all around him had vanished, and he was alone with himself, he added: "Poor chap, he thinks he can paint!"

And this instance shows that whether the habit is a mental weakness or only a physical defect, it is capable of extremely awkward consequences, as in the case of the banker who was ruined by unwittingly revealing his secrets while walking in the street. How is it possible to keep a secret or conduct a bargain if your tongue is uncontrollable? What is the use of Jones explaining to his wife that he has been kept late at the office if his tongue goes on to say, entirely without his knowledge or consent, that had he declared "no trumps" in that last hand he

would have been in pocket by his evening at the club? I see horrible visions of domestic complications and public disaster arising from this not uncommon habit.

And yet might there not be gain also from a universal practice of uttering our thoughts aloud? Imagine a world in which nobody had any secrets from anybody—could have no secrets from anybody. I see the Kaiser, after consciously declaring that his only purpose is peace, unconsciously blurting out to the British Ambassador that the ultimatum to Serbia is a “plant”—that what Germany means is war, that she proposes to attack Belgium, and so on. And I see the British Ambassador, having explained that England is entirely free from commitments, adding dreamily, “But if there’s a war we shall be in it.” In the same way Jones, after making Smith a firm offer of £30 for his horse, would say, absent-mindedly, “Of course it would be cheap at £50, and I might spring £55 if he is stiff about it.”

It would be a world in which lies would have no value and deception would be a waste of time—a world in which truth would no longer be at the bottom of the well, but on the tip of every man’s tongue. We should have all the rascals in prison and all the dishonest traders in the bankruptcy court. Secret diplomacy would no longer play with the lives of men, for there would be no secrets. Those little perverse concealments that wreck so many lives would vanish. You, sir, who find it so easy to nag at home and so difficult to say the kind thing that

you know to be true, would be discovered to your great advantage and to the peace of your household.

Yes, I think the world would go very well if we all had tongues that told our true thoughts in spite of us. But what a lot of us would be found out. My own face crimsoned at the thought. So, perhaps, does yours.

### A FELLOW TRAVELLER

I DO not know which of us got into the carriage first. Indeed I did not know he was in the carriage at all for some time. It was the last train from London to a Midland town—a stopping train, an infinitely leisurely train, one of those trains which give you an understanding of eternity. It was tolerably full when it started, but as we stopped at the suburban stations the travellers alighted in ones and twos, and by the time we had left the outer ring of London behind I was alone—or, rather, I thought I was alone.

There is a pleasant sense of freedom about being alone in a carriage that is jolting noisily through the night. It is liberty and unrestraint in a very agreeable form. You can do anything you like. You can talk to yourself as loud as you please and no one will hear you. You can have that argument out with Jones and roll him triumphantly in the dust without fear of a counterstroke. You can stand on your

head and no one will see you. You can sing, or dance a two-step, or practise a golf stroke, or play marbles on the floor without let or hindrance. You can open the window or shut it without provoking a protest. You can open both windows or shut both. Indeed, you can go on opening them and shutting them as a sort of festival of freedom. You can have any corner you choose and try all of them in turn. You can lie at full length on the cushions and enjoy the luxury of breaking the regulations.

On this night I did not do any of these things. They did not happen to occur to me. What I did was much more ordinary. When the last of my fellow passengers had gone I put down my paper, stretched my arms and my legs, stood up and looked out of the window on the calm summer night through which I was journeying, noting the pale reminiscence of day that still lingered in the northern sky; crossed the carriage and looked out of the other window; lit a cigarette, sat down, and began to read again. It was then that I became aware of my fellow traveller. He came and sat on my nose. . . . He was one of those wingy, nippy, intrepid insects that we call, vaguely, mosquitoes. I flicked him off my nose, and he made a tour of the compartment, investigated its three dimensions, visited each window, fluttered round the light, decided that there was nothing so interesting as that large animal in the corner, came and had a look at my neck.

I flicked him off again. He skipped away, took another jaunt round the compartment, returned, and

seated himself impudently on the back of my hand. It is enough, I said; magnanimity has its limits. Twice you have been warned that I am someone in particular, that my august person resents the tickling impertinences of strangers. I assume the black cap. I condemn you to death. Justice demands it, and the court awards it. The counts against you are many. You are a vagrant; you are a public nuisance; you are travelling without a ticket; you have no meat coupon. For these and many other misdemeanours you are about to die. I struck a swift, lethal blow with my right hand. He dodged the attack with an insolent ease that humiliated me. My personal vanity was aroused. I lunged at him with my hand, with my paper; I jumped on the seat and pursued him round the lamp; I adopted tactics of feline cunning, waiting till he had alighted, approaching with a horrible stealthiness, striking with a sudden and terrible swiftness.

It was all in vain. He played with me, openly and ostentatiously, like a skilful matador finessing round an infuriated bull. It was obvious that he was enjoying himself, that it was for this that he had disturbed my repose. He wanted a little sport, and what sport like being chased by this huge, lumbering windmill of a creature, who tasted so good and seemed so helpless and so stupid? I began to enter into the spirit of the fellow. He was no longer a mere insect. He was developing into a personality, an intelligence that challenged the possession of this compartment with me on equal terms. I felt my heart warming

towards him and the sense of superiority fading. How could I feel superior to a creature who was so manifestly my master in the only competition in which we had ever engaged? Why not be magnanimous again? Magnanimity and mercy were the noblest attributes of man. In the exercise of these high qualities I could recover my prestige. At present I was a ridiculous figure, a thing for laughter and derision. By being merciful I could reassert the moral dignity of man and go back to my corner with honour. I withdraw the sentence of death, I said, returning to my seat. I cannot kill you, but I can reprieve you. I do it.

I took up my paper and he came and sat on it. Foolish fellow, I said, you have delivered yourself into my hands. I have but to give this respectable weekly organ of opinion a smack on both covers and you are a corpse, neatly sandwiched between an article on "Peace Traps" and another on "The Modesty of Mr. Hughes." But I shall not do it. I have reprieved you, and I will satisfy you that when this large animal says a thing he means it. Moreover, I no longer desire to kill you. Through knowing you better I have come to feel—shall I say?—a sort of affection for you. I fancy that St. Francis would have called you "little brother." I cannot go so far as that in Christian charity and civility. But I recognise a more distant relationship. Fortune has made us fellow travellers on this summer night. I have interested you and you have entertained me. The obligation is mutual and it is founded on the

fundamental fact—that we are fellow mortals. The miracle of life is ours in common and its mystery too. I suppose you don't know anything about your journey. I'm not sure that I know much about mine. We are really, when you come to think of it, a good deal alike—just apparitions that are and then are not, coming out of the night into the lighted carriage, fluttering about the lamp for a while and going out into the night again. Perhaps . . .

“Going on to-night, sir?” said a voice at the window. It was a friendly porter giving me a hint that this was my station. I thanked him and said I must have been dozing. And seizing my hat and stick I went out into the cool summer night. As I closed the door of the compartment I saw my fellow traveller fluttering round the lamp. . . .

## ON A SHINY NIGHT

THE pleasantest hour of my day is the hour about midnight. It is then that I leave the throbbing heart of Fleet Street behind me, jump on to the last bus bound for a distant suburb, and commandeer the back corner seat. If the back seat is not vacant I sit as near as I can and watch the enemy who possesses it with a vigilant eye. When he rises I pounce on the quarry like a kestrel on its prey. I love the back seat, not only because it is the most comfortable,



but also because it gives you the sense of solitude in the midst of a crowd, which is one of the most enjoyable sensations I know. To see and not be seen, to watch the human comedy unobserved, save by the friendly stars who look down very searchingly but never blab, to have the advantages of both solitude and society in one breath, as it were—this is my idea of enjoyment.

But most of all I love the back seat on such a night as last night, when the crescent moon is sailing high in a cloudless sky and making all the earth a wonder of romance. The garish day is of the earth, "the huge and thoughtful night" when no moon is seen and the constellations blaze in unimaginable space is of the eternal; but here in this magic glamour of the moon where night and day are wedded is the realm of romance. You may wander all day in the beech woods and never catch a glimpse of Tristan and Iseult coming down the glades or hear an echo of Robin Hood's horn; but walk in the beech woods by moonlight and every shadow will have its mystery and will talk to you of the legends of long ago.

That was why Sir Walter Scott had such a passion for *Cumnor Hall*. "After the labours of the day were over," said Irving, "we often walked in the meadows, especially in the moonlight nights; and he seemed never weary of repeating the first stanza:

The dews of summer night did fall—  
The moon, sweet regent of the sky,  
Silvered the walls of Cumnor Hall,  
And many an oak that stood thereby."

There you have the key to all the world of Sir Walter. He was the King of the Moonlighters. He was a man who would have been my most dreaded rival on the midnight bus. He would have wanted the back seat, I know, and there he would have sat and chanted *Cumnor Hall* to himself and watched the moonlight touching the suburban streets to poetry and turning every suburban garden into a twilight mystery.

There are, of course, quite prosaic and even wicked people who love "a shiny night." There is, for example, the gentleman from "famous Lincolnshire" whose refrain is:

Oh, 'tis my delight  
On a shiny night,  
In the season of the year.

I love his song because it is about the moonlight, and I am not sure that I am much outraged by the fact that he liked the shiny night because he was a poacher. I never could affect any indignation about poachers. I suspect that I rather like them. Anyhow, there is no stanza of that jolly song which I sing with more heartiness than:

Success to every gentleman that lives in Lincolnshire,  
Success to every poacher that wants to sell a hare.  
Bad luck to every gamekeeper that will not sell his deer.  
Oh, 'tis my delight, etc

And there was Dick Turpin. He, too, loved the moonlight for very practical reasons. He loved it not because it silvered the oak, but because of that

deep shadow of the oak in which he could stand with Black Bess and await the coming of his victim.

And it is that shadow which is the real secret of the magic of moonlight. The shadows of the day have beauty but no secrecy. The sunlight is too strong to be wholly or even very materially denied. Even its shadows are luminous and full of colour, and the contrast between light and shade is not the contrast between the visible and the invisible, between the light and the dark: it is only a contrast between degrees of brightness. Everything is bright, but some things are more bright than others. But in the moonlight the world is etched in black and white. The shadows are flat and unrevealing. They have none of the colour values produced by the reflected lights in the shadows of the day. They are as secret as the grave; distinct personalities, sharply figured against the encompassing light, not mere passages of colour tuned to a lower key. And the quality of the encompassing light itself emphasises the contrast. The moon does not bring out the colour of things, but touches them with a glacial pallor—

. . . Strange she is, and secret.

Strange her eyes; her cheeks are cold as cold sea-shells

See the moonlight fall upon your house-front and mark the wonderful effect of black and white that it creates. Under the play of the moonbeams it becomes a house of mysteries. The lights seem lighter than by day, but that is only because the darks are so much darker. That shadow cast by the gable

makes a blackness in which anything may lurk, and it is the secrecy of the shadow in a world of light that is the soul of romance.

Take a walk in the woods in the bright moonlight<sup>\*</sup> over tracks that you think you could follow blindfold, and you will marvel at the tricks which those black shadows of the trees can play with the most familiar scenes. Keats, who was as much of a moonlighter in spirit as Scott, knew those impenetrable shadows well:

... tender is the night,  
And haply the Queen-moon is on her throne,  
Cluster'd around by all her starry Pays;  
But here there is no light,  
Save what from heaven is with the breezes blown  
Through verdurous glooms and winding mossy ways.

In this moonlight world you may skip at will from the known to the unknown, have publicity on one side of the way and secrecy on the other, walk in the light to see Jessica's face, and in the shadow to escape the prying eyes of Shylock. Hence through all time it has been the Elysium of lovers, and "Astarte, queen of heaven, with crescent horns," has been the goddess whom they serve,

To whose bright image nightly by the moon,  
Sidonian virgins paid their vows and songs.

Perhaps it is the eternal lover in us that responds so unfailingly to the magic of the moonlight.

## THE GREAT GOD GUN

A FEW days ago I saw the Advent of the Great God Gun. The goddess Aphrodite, according to ancient mythology, rose out of the foam of the sea, and the Great God Gun, too, emerged from a bath, but it was a bath of fire—fire so white and intense that the eyes were blinded by it as they are blinded by the light of the unclouded sun at midday.

Our presence had been timed for the moment of his coming. We stood in a great chamber higher than a cathedral nave, and with something even less than the dim religious light of a cathedral nave. The exterior of the temple was plain even to ugliness, a tower of high, windowless walls faced with corrugated iron. Within was a maze of immense mysteries, mighty cylinders towering into the gloom above, great pits descending into the gloom below, gigantic cranes showing against the dim skylight, with here and there a Cyclopean figure clad in oily overalls and with a face grimy and perspiring.

The signal was given. Two shadowy figures that appeared in the darkness above one of the cylinders began their incantations. A giant crane towered above them and one saw its mighty claw descend into the orifice of the cylinder as if to drag some Eurydice out of the hell within. Then the word was spoken and somewhere a lever, or perhaps only an electric button, was touched. But at that touch

the whole front of the mighty cylinder from top to bottom opened and swung back slowly and majestically, and one stood before a pillar of flame forty feet high, pure and white, an infinity of intolerable light, from whence a wave of heat came forth like a living thing. And as the door opened the Cyclopes above—strange Dantesque figures now swallowed up in the gloom, now caught in the light of the furnace—set the crane in motion, and through the open door of the cylinder came the god, suspended from the claw of the crane that gripped it like the fingers of a hand.

It emerged slowly like a column of solid light—mystic, wonderful. All night it had stood imprisoned in the cylinder enveloped by that bath of incalculable hotness, and as it came out from the ordeal, it was as white as the furnace within. The great hand of the crane bore it forward with a solemn slowness until it paused over the mouth of one of the pits. I had looked into this pit and seen that it was filled nearly to the brim with a slimy liquid. It was a pit of oil—tens of thousands of gallons of high-flash rape oil. It was the second bath of the god.

The monster, the whiteness of his heat now flushing to pink, paused above the pit. Then gravely, under the direction of the iron hand that held him suspended in mid-air, he began to descend into the oil. The breech end of the incandescent column touched the surface of the liquid, and at that touch there leapt out of the mouth of the pit great tongues of flame. As the red pillar sank deeper and deeper in the pit the flames burst up through the muzzle and licked

with fury about the ruthless claw as if to tear it to pieces. But it would not let go. Lower and lower sank the god until even his head was submerged and he stood invisible beneath us, robed in his cloak of oil.

And there we will leave him to toughen and harden as he drinks in the oil hungrily through his burning pores. Soon he will be caught up in the claw of the crane again, lifted out of his bath and lowered into an empty pit near by. And upon him will descend another tube, that has passed through the same trials, and that will fit him as the skin fits the body. And then in due course he will be provided with yet another coat. Round and round him will be wound miles of flattened wire, put on at a tension of unthinkable resistance. And even then there remains his outer garment, his jacket, to swell still further his mighty bulk. After that he will be equipped with his brain—all the wonderful mechanism of breech and cradle—and then one day he will be carried to the huge structure near by, where the Great God Gun, in all his manifestations, from the little mountain ten-pounder to the leviathan fifteen-inch, rests shining and wonderful, to be sent forth with his message of death and destruction.

The savage, we are told, is misguided enough to "bow down to wood and stone." Poor savage! If we could only take him, with his childlike intelligence, into our temple to see the god that the genius and industry of civilised man has created, a god so vast that a hundred men could not lift him, of such

incredible delicacy' that his myriad parts are fitted together to the thousandth, the ten-thousandth, and even the hundred-thousandth of an inch, and out of whose throat there issue thunders and lightnings' that carry ruin for tens of miles. How ashamed the poor savage would be of his idols of wood and stone! How he would abase himself before the god of the Christian nations!

And what a voracious deity he is! Here in the great arsenal of Woolwich one passes through miles and miles of bewildering activities, foundries where the forty-ton hammer falls with the softness of a caress upon the great column of molten metal, and gives it the first crude likeness of the god, where vast converters are sending out flames of an unearthly hue and brightness, or where men clothed in grime and perspiration are swinging about billets of steel that scorch you as they pass from the furnace to the steam-press in which they are stamped like putty into the rough shape of great shells; shops where the roar of thousands of lathes drowns the voice and where the food of the god is passing through a multitude of preparations more delicate than any known to the kitchens of Lucullus; pools of silence where grave scientific men are at their calculations and their tests, and where mechanics who are the princes of their trade show you delicate instruments gauged to the hundred-thousandth of an inch that are so precious that they will scarcely let you handle them; mysterious chambers where the high explosives are handled and where the shells are filled, where you



walk in felt slippers upon padded floors and dare not drop a pin lest you wake an earthquake, and where you see men working (for what pay I know not) with materials more terrible than lightnings, themselves partitioned off from eternity only by the scrupulous observance of the meticulous laws of this realm of the sleeping Furies.

A great town--a town whose activities alone are equal to all the labour of a city like Leeds--all devoted to the service of a god who lies there, mystic, wonderful, waiting to speak his oracles to men. I see the poor savage growing more and more ashamed of his wood and stone. And this, good savage, is only a trifling part of our devotions. All over the land wherever you go you shall find furnaces blazing to his glory, mountains shattered to make his ribs, factories throbbing day and night to feed his gigantic maw and to clothe his servants.

You shall go down to the great rivers and hear a thousand hammers beating their music out of the hulls of mighty ships that are to be the chariots of the god, in which he will go forth to preach his gospel. You shall go down into the bowels of the earth and see half-naked men toiling in the blackness by the dim light of the safety-lamp to win that wonderful food which is the ultimate food of the god, power to forge his frame, power to drive his chariots, power to wing his bolts. You shall go to our temples of learning and the laboratories of our universities and see the miracles of destruction that science, the proudest achievement of man, can wring out of that

astonishing mystery coal-tar. You shall go to our ports and watch the ships riding in proudly from the seas with their tributes from afar to the god. And behind all this activity you shall see a nation working day and night to pay for the food of the god, throwing all its accumulated wealth into the furnace to keep the engines going, pawning its future to the uttermost farthing and to the remotest generation.

And wherever the white man dwells, good savage, the same vision awaits you—

... where Rhine unto the sea,  
And Thames and Tiber, Seine and Danube run,  
And where great armies glitter in the sun,  
And great kings rule and men are boasted free.

Everywhere the hammers are ringing, the forests are falling, the harvests are being gathered, and men and women toil like galley slaves chained to the oar to build more and more of the image and feed him more lavishly with the food of death. You cannot escape the great traffic of the god though you go to the outposts of the earth. The horses of the pampas are being rounded up to drag his waggon, the sheep of Australia are being sheared to clothe his slaves, the pine trees of Lapland are being split for his service, the silence of the Arctic seas is broken by the throbbing of his chariots. As a neutral, good savage, you shall be free to go to Essen and see marvels no less wonderful than these you have seen at Woolwich, and all through Europe from Bremen to the Golden Horn the same infinite toil in the service of the Great God Gun will greet your astonished eyes.

Then, it may be, you will pass to where the god delivers his message; on sea where one word from his mouth sends a thousand men and twenty thousand tons of metal in one huge dust-storm to the skies; on land where over hundreds of miles of battle front the towns and villages are mounds of rubbish, where the desolate earth is riven and shattered by that treachy stuff you saw being ladled into the shells in the danger rooms at Woolwich or Essen, where the dead lie thick as leaves in autumn, and where in every wood you will come upon the secret shrines of the god. At one light touch of the lever he lifts his head, coughs his mighty guttural speech and sinks back as if convulsed. He has spoken, the earth trembles, the trees about him shudder at the shock. And standing in the observatory you will see far off a great black, billowy mass rise in the clear sky and you will know that the god has blown another god like unto him into fragments, and that in that mass that rises and falls is the wreckage of many a man who has looked his last upon the sun and will never till the home fields again or gladden the eyes of those he has left in some distant land.

And then, to complete your experience, you shall hear from the prophets of the Great God Gun the praises of his gospel, how that gospel is an abiding part of the white man's faith, how it acts as a moral medicine to humanity, purging it of its vices and teaching it the higher virtues (a visit to the music halls and the Strand at midnight will help your

## ON A MAP OF THE OBERLAND 37

simple mind to realise this), and how the words of the poet, uttered in satire--

That civilisation doos git forrad  
Sometimes upon a powder-cart --

were in truth the words of eternal wisdom.

I see the poor savage returning sadly to his home and gazing with mingled scorn and humiliation at his futile image of wood and stone. Perhaps another feeling will mingle with his sadness. Perhaps he will be perplexed and puzzled. For he may have heard of another religion that the white man serves, and it may be difficult for his simple mind to reconcile that religion with the gospel of that Great God Gun.

## ON A MAP OF THE OBERLAND

I WAS rummaging among my books this morning when I came across Frey's map of the Bernese Oberland, and forthwith forgot the object of my search in the presence of this exhilarating discovery. Mr. Chesterton, I think, once described how he evoked the emotions of a holiday by calling a cab, piling it up with luggage, and driving to the station. Then, having had his sensation, he drove home again. It seemed to me rather a poor way of taking an imaginative holiday. One might as well heat an empty oven in order to imagine a feast. The true medium of the spiritual holiday is the map. That

is the magic carpet that whisks you away from this sodden earth and unhappy present to sunny lands and serener days.

There are times when books offer no escape from the burden of things, when, as Mr. Biglow says,

I'm as unsoshul as a stone,  
And kind o' suffercate to be alone;

but there are no circumstances in which a map will not do the trick. I do not care whether it is a map of the known or the unknown, the visited or the unvisited, the real or the fanciful. It was the jolly map which Stevenson invented in an idle hour which became the seed of *Treasure Island*. That is how a map stimulated his fancy and sent it out on a career of immortal adventure. And though you have not Stevenson's genius for describing the adventure, that is what a map will do for you if you have a spark of the boy's love of romance left in your soul. It is the "magic casement" of the poet. I have never crossed the Atlantic in the flesh, but, lord, what spiritual adventures I have had with maps in the enchanted world on the other side! I have sailed with Drake in Nombre de Dios Bay, and navigated the grim straits with Magellan, and lived with the Incas of Peru and the bloody Pizarro, and gone up the broad bosom of the Amazon into fathomless forests, and sailed through the Golden Gates on golden afternoons, and stood with Cortes "silent upon a peak in Darien." I know the Shenandoah Valley far better than I know Wimbledon Common, and

have fought over every inch of it by the side of Stonewall Jackson, just as I have lived in the mazes of the Wilderness with Grant and Lee.

Do not tell me I have never been to these places and a thousand others like them. I swear that I have. I have traversed them all in the kingdom of the mind, and if you will give me a map and a rainy day (like this) I will go on a holiday more entrancing than any that Mr. Cook ever planned. It is not taking tickets that makes the traveller. I have known people who have gone round the world without seeing anything, while Thoreau could stay in his back garden and entertain the universe.

But if maps of the unvisited earth have the magic of romance in them, maps of the places you have known have a fascination no less rich and deep. They, too, take you out on a holiday, but it is a holiday of memory and not of the imagination. You are back with yourself in other days and in other places and with other friends. You may tell me that this was a dreary, rainy morning, sir, and that I spent it looking out over the dismal valley and the sad cornfields with their stricken crops. Nothing of the sort. I spent it in the Bernese Oberland, with an incomparable companion. Three weeks I put in, sir, three weeks on the glaciers. See, there, on this glorious map of Frey's, is Mürren, from whence we started. In front is the mighty snow mass of the Jungfrau, the Mönch and the Eiger, shutting out the glacier solitudes whither we are bound.

There goes our track up the ravine to Oberstein-

berg and there is the Mütthorn hut, standing on the bit of barren rock that sticks out from the great ice-billows of the Tschingelhorn glacier. Do you remember, companion of mine, the mighty bowls of steaming tea we drank when we reached that haven of refuge? And do you remember our start from the hut at two o'clock in the morning, roped with our guide and with our lanterns lit—and the silence of our march over the snow and ice beneath the glittering stars, and the hollow boom of distant avalanches, and the breaking of the wondrous dawn over the ice-fields, and the unforgettable view as we reached the ridge of the Petersgrat and saw across the Rhone Valley the great mountain masses beyond—the Weisshorn, the Matterhorn Mont Blanc, and the rest—touched to an unearthly beauty by the flush of the new risen sun? And the scramble up the Tschingelhorn, and the long grind down the ice-slopes and the moraine to the seclusion of the Lötschenthal? And then the days that followed in the great ice region behind the Jungfrau; the long, silent marches over pathless snows and by yawning crevasses, the struggle up peaks in the dawn, and the nights in the huts, sometimes with other climbers who blew in across the snows from some remote adventure, sometimes alone as in that tiny hut on the Finsteraarhorn, where we paid three and a half francs for a bunch of wood to boil our kettle?

There is the Oberaar hut standing on the ledge of a dizzy precipice. Do you remember the sunset we saw from thence, when out of the general gloom

of the conquering night one beam from the vanished sun caught the summit of the Dom and made it gleam like a palace in the heavens or like the towers of the radiant city that Christian saw across the dark river. And there at the end of the journey is the great glacier that leaps down, seven thousand feet, between the Schreckhorn and the Wetterhorn, to the gracious valley of Grindelwald. How innocent it looks on this map, but what a day of gathering menace was that when we got caught between the impassable crevasses, and night came on and the rain came down and . . . But let the magic carpet hasten slowly here . . .

It was still dark when Heinrich of the Looking Glass leapt up from our bed of hay in the Dolfuss hut, lit the candle and began to prepare the breakfast. Outside, the rain came down in torrents, and the clouds hung thick and low over glacier and peaks. Our early start for the Gleckstein hut was thwarted. Night turned to dawn and dawn to day, and still the rain pelted down on that vast solitude of rock and ice. Then the crest of the Finsteraarhorn appeared through a rent in the clouds, patches of blue broke up the grey menace of the sky, the rain ceased. Otmar and Heinrich hastily washed the iron cups and plates and swept the floor of the hut, and then, shouldering our rucksacks and closing the door of the empty hut, we scrambled down the rocks to the glacier.

It was 8.15, and the guide-books said it was a seven hours' journey to the Gleckstein. That seemed to leave ample margin; but do not trust guide-



books in a season of drought when the crevasses are open.

This wisdom, however, came later. All through the morning we made excellent progress. The sun shone, the clouds hung lightly about the peaks, the ice was in excellent condition. Heinrich, who brought up the rear, occasionally broke into song. Now, when Heinrich sings you know that all is well. When he whistles you are in a tight place. For the rest he is silent. Otmar, his brother, is less communicative. He goes on ahead silently under all conditions, skirting crevasses, testing snow bridges to see if they will bear, occasionally pausing to consult his maps. Once only did he burst into song that day--but of that later. Otmar is an autocrat on the ice or the rocks. In the hut he will make your tea and oil your boots and help Heinrich to wash your cups and sweep the floor. But out in the open he is your master. If you ask him inconvenient questions he does not hear. If you suggest a second breakfast before it is due his silence as he pounds forward ahead humiliates you. If your pace slackens there is a rebuke in the taut insistence of the rope.

It was eleven when we halted for our cold tea and sardines (white wine for Otmar and Heinrich). The pause gave Heinrich an opportunity of taking out his pocket looking-glass and touching up his moustache ends and giving a flick to his eyebrows. Heinrich is as big and brawny as an ox, but he has the soul of a dandy.

It had been easy going on the furrowed face of

the ice, but when we came to the snow slope that leads to the Lauteraar saddle our pace slackened. The snow was soft, and we sank at each step up to our shins. Otmar eased the passage up the slope by zigzagging, but it was one o'clock when we came face to face with the wall of snow, flanked by walls of rock which form the "saddle." Otmar led my companion over the rocks; but decided that Heinrich should bring me up the snow face. Step-cutting is slow work, and though Otmar, having reached the top of the saddle, threw down a second rope, which Heinrich lashed round his waist, it was two o'clock before that terrible wall was surmounted, and we could look down the great glacier that plunges seven thousand feet down into the hollow where Grindelwald lay with its red roofs and pleasant pastures, its hotels and its tourists.

We had taken nearly six hours to surmount the pass, but we seemed, nevertheless, to have the day well in hand. Four thousand feet down on a spur of the Wetterhorn we could see the slate roof of the Gleckstein hut. It seemed an easy walk over the glacier, but in these vast solitudes of ice and snow and rock vision is deceptive. The distant seems incredibly near, for the familiar measurements of the eye are wanting.

The weather had changed again. Clouds had settled on the mighty cliffs of the Schreckhorn on our left and the Wetterhorn on our right. Mist was rolling over the pass; rain began to fall. We cut short our lunch (cold tea, cold veal, bread and jam), and

began our descent, making a wide detour of the glacier to the right in the direction of the Wetterhorn. We descended a rocky precipice that cleaves the glacier, crossed an ice slope on which Otmar had to cut steps, and came in view of Grindelwald, lying like a picture-postcard far down below—so immediately below that it seemed that one might fling a stone down into its midst.

At half-past three it began to dawn on me that things were not going well. Otmar had, during the past three weeks, been the most skilful of guides over most of the great glacier passes of the Oberland and up many a peak; but so far we had seen nothing like the condition of the Grindelwaldfirn. The appalling slope of this great sea of ice makes a descent in normal times a task of difficulty. But this year the long drought had left open all the yawning crevasses with which it is seamed and its perils were infinitely increased.

Again and again Otmar sought a way out of the maze, taking us across perilous snow bridges and cutting steps on knife-edges of ice where one looked down the glittering slope on one side and into the merciless green-blue depths of the crevasse on the other. But wherever he turned he was baulked. Always the path led to some vast fissure which could be neither leapt nor bridged. Once we seemed to have escaped and glissaded swiftly down. Then the slope got steeper and we walked—steeper and Otmar began cutting steps in the ice—steeper and Otmar paused and looked down the leap of the

glacier. We stood silent for his verdict. "It will not go." We turned on the rope without a word, and began remounting our steps.

It was half-past four. The mist was thickening, the rain falling steadily. Below, the red roofs and green pastures of Grindelwald gleamed in the sunlight of the valley. Nearer, the slate roof of the Gleckstein on its spur of rock was still visible. Two hours before it had seemed but a step to either. Now they seemed to have receded to another hemisphere.

For the first time there flashed through the mind the thought that possibly we should not reach the hut after all. A night on the glacier, or rather on the dark ridges of the Wetterhorn! A wet night too.

The same thought was working in Otmar's mind. No word came from him, no hint that he was concerned. But the whole bearing of the man was changed. In the long hours of the morning he had led us listlessly and silently; now he was like a hound on the trail. The tug of the rope became more insistent. He made us face difficulties that he had skirted before; took us on to snow bridges that made the mind reel; slashed steps with his ice axe with a swift haste that spoke in every stroke of the coming night. Once I failed to take a tricky snow ridge that came to a point between two crevasses, slipped back, and found myself in the crevasse, with my feet dancing upon nothing. The rope held; Otmar hauled me out without a word, and we resumed our march.

Heinrich had been unroped earlier and sent to prospect from above for a possible way out. We followed at his call, but he led us into new mazes, down into a great cavern in the glacier, where we passed over the ruined walls and buttresses of an ice cathedral, emerging on the surface of the glacier again, only to find ourselves once more checked by impassable gulfs.

It was now half-past five. We had been three and a half hours in vainly attempting to find a way down the ice. The mist had come thick upon us. The peaks were blotted out, Grindelwald was blotted out; the hut was no longer visible. Only an hour and a half of light remained, and the whole problem was still unsolved. The possibility of a night on the ice or the rocks began to approach the sphere of certainty. My strength was giving out, and I slipped again and again in the ice steps. A kind of dull resignation had taken possession of the mind. One went forward in a stupor, responsive to the tug of the rope, but indifferent to all else.

Otmar was now really concerned. He came from a valley south of the Rhone, and was unfamiliar with this pass; but he is of a great strain of Alpine guides, is proud of his achievements—he had led in the first ascent of the Zmutt ridge of the Matterhorn that year—and to be benighted on a glacier would have been a deadly blow to his pride.

He unroped himself, and dashed away in the direction of the ridge of the Wetterhorn that plunged down on our right. We watched him skimming

across crevasses, pausing here and there to slash a step in the ice for foothold, balancing himself on icy ridges and vanishing into a couloir of the mountain—first depositing his rucksack on the rocks to await his return. Five minutes passed—ten. Heinrich startled the silence with an halloo—no answer. A quarter of an hour—then, from far below, a faint cry came.

"It will go," said Heinrich, "get on." We hurried across the intervening ice, and met Otmar returning like a cat up the rocks. Down that narrow slit in the mountain we descended with headlong speed. There were drops of thirty and fifty feet, slabs of rock to cross with meticulous foot and hand hold, passages of loose rock where a careless move would have sent great stones thundering on the heads of those before. Once Heinrich lowered me like a bale of goods down a smooth-faced precipice of fifty feet. Once he cried: "Quick: it is dangerous," and looking up at the crest of the Wetterhorn I saw a huge block of ice poised perilously above our downward path.

The night was now upon us. We were wet to the skin. A thunderstorm of exceptional violence added to the grimness of the setting. But we were down the ridge at last. We raced across a narrow tongue of the glacier and were safe on the spur of rocks where we knew the Gleckstein hut to be. But there was no light to guide us. We scrambled breathlessly over boulders and across torrents from the Wetterhorn, each of us hardly visible to the other in the thickening mist, save when the blaze of lightning

flashed the scene into sudden and 'spectral clearness. At last we struck a rough mountain path, and five minutes later we lifted the latch of the hut.

"What is the time, Heinrich?"

"Half-past eight."

"What would you have done, Otmar, if we had been benighted?"

Otmar did not hear. But as he got the wood and made the fire, and emptied the rucksacks of our provisions, he began to sing in a pleasant tenor voice. And Heinrich joined in with his full bass.

And presently, stripped of our wet clothes and wrapped in blankets, we sat down to a glorious meal of steaming tea— in an iron teapot as large as a pail—tongue, soup, potted chicken, and jam.

"That was a narrow escape from a night on the mountains," I said.

"It is a very foolish glacier," said Heinrich.

Otmar said nothing.

Five hours later Otmar woke us from our bed of hay.

"It is fine," he said. "The Wetterhorn will go."

As I look up it is still raining and the sad sheaves still stand in the sodden fields. But I have been a journey. I have had three weeks in the Oberland—three weeks of summer days with a world at peace, the world that seems like a dream we once had, so remote has it become and so incredible. I roll up my magic carpet and bless the man who invented maps for the solace of men.

## IN DEFENCE OF WASPS

It is time, I think, that someone said a good word for the wasp. He is no saint, but he is being abused beyond his deserts. He has been unusually prolific this summer, and agitated correspondents have been busy writing to the newspapers to explain how you may fight him and how by holding your breath you may miraculously prevent him stinging you. Now the point about the wasp is that he doesn't want to sting you. He is, in spite of his military uniform and his formidable weapon, not a bad fellow, and if you leave him alone he will leave you alone. He is a nuisance, of course. He likes jam and honey; but then I am bound to confess that I like jam and honey too, and I daresay those correspondents who denounce him so bitterly like jam and honey. We shouldn't like to be sent to the scaffold because we like jam and honey. But let him have a reasonable helping from the pot or the plate, and he is as civil as anybody. He has his moral delinquencies no doubt. He is an habitual drunkard. He reels away, in a ludicrously helpless condition, from a debauch of honey, and he shares man's weakness for beer. In the language of America, he is a "wet." He cannot resist beer, and having rather a weak head for liquor he gets most disgracefully tight and staggers about quite unable to fly, and doubtless declaring that he won't go home till morning. I suspect that his favourite author is Mr. Belloc—not because he writes so wisely about the



war, nor so waspishly about Puritans, but because he writes so boisterously about beer.

This weakness for beer is one of the causes of his undoing. An empty beer-bottle will attract him in hosts, and once inside he never gets out. He is indeed the easiest creature to deal with that flies on wings. He is excessively stupid and unsuspecting. A fly will trust nobody and nothing, and has a vision that takes in the whole circumference of things; but a wasp will walk into any trap, like the country bumpkin that he is, and will never have the sense to walk out the way he went in. And on your plate he simply waits for you to squeeze his thorax. You can descend on him as leisurely as you like. He seems to have no sight for anything above him, and no sense of looking upward. His intelligence, in spite of the mathematical genius with which he fashions his cells, is contemptible, and Fabre, who kept a colony under glass, tells us that he cannot associate entrance and exit. If his familiar exit is cut off, it does not occur to him that he can go out by the way he always comes in. A very stupid fellow.

If you compare his morals with those of the honey-bee, of course, he cuts a poor figure. The bee never goes on the spree. It avoids beer like poison, and keeps decorously outside the house. It doesn't waste its time in riotous living, but goes on ceaselessly working day and night during its six brief weeks of life, laying up honey for the winter and for future generations to enjoy. But the rascally fellow in the yellow stripes just lives for the hour. No thought of

the morrow for him, thank you. Let us eat, drink, and be merry, he says, for to-morrow—. He runs through his little fortune of life at top speed, has a roaring time in August, and has vanished from the scene by late September, leaving only the queen behind in some snug retreat to raise a new family of twenty thousand or so next summer.

But I repeat that he is inoffensive if you let him alone. Of course, if you hit him he will hit back, and if you attack his nest he will defend it. But he will not go for you unprovoked, as a bee sometimes will. Yet he could afford this luxury of unprovoked warfare much better than the bee, for, unlike the bee, he does not die when he stings. I feel competent to speak of the relative dispositions of wasps and bees, for I've been living in the midst of them. There are fifteen hives in the orchard, with an estimated population of a quarter of a million bees and tens of thousands of wasps about the cottage. I find that I am never deliberately attacked by a wasp, but when a bee begins circling around me I flee for shelter. There's nothing else to do. For, unlike the wasp, the bee's hatred is personal. It dislikes you as an individual for some obscure reason, and is always ready to die for the satisfaction of its anger. And it dies very profusely. The expert, who has been taking sections from the hives, showed me her hat just now. It had nineteen stings in it, planted in as neatly as thorns in a bicycle-tyre.

It is not only in his liking for beer that the wasp resembles man. Like him, too, he is an omnivorous

eater. If you don't pick your pears in the nick of time he will devastate them nearly as completely as the starling devastates the cherry-tree. He loves butcher's meat, raw or cooked, and I like to see the workman-like way in which he saws off his little joint, usually fat, and sails away with it for home. But his real virtue, and this is why I say a good word for him, is that he is a clean fellow, and is the enemy of that unclean creature the fly, especially of that supreme abomination, the blow-fly. His method in dealing with it is very cunning. I saw him at work on the table at lunch the other day. He got the blow-fly down, but did not kill it. With his mandibles he sawed off one of the creature's wings to prevent the possibility of escape, and then with a huge effort lifted it bodily and sailed heavily away. And I confess he carried my enthusiastic approval with him. There goes a whole generation of flies, said I, nipped in the bud.

And let this be said for him also: he has bowels of compassion. He will help a fellow in distress. Fabre records that he once observed a number of wasps taking food to one that was unable to fly owing to an injury to its wings. This was continued for days, and the attendant wasps were frequently seen to stroke gently the injured wings.

There is, of course, a contra account, especially in the minds of those who keep bees and have seen a host of wasps raiding a weak stock and carrying the hive by storm. I am far from wishing to represent the wasp as an unmitigated blessing. He is not that, and when I see a queen wasp sunning herself in the early

spring days I consider it my business to kill her. I am sure that there will be enough without that one. But in preserving the equilibrium of Nature the wasp has its uses, and if we wish ill to flies we ought to have a reasonable measure of tolerance for their enemy.

## TO AN UNKNOWN ARTIST

It is certainly an unequal world. As I was crossing Piccadilly Circus yesterday my eye fell on a man at work on the building that is being pulled down at the corner of Regent Street, next to the "Criterion."<sup>1</sup> He was standing on a fragment of wall of the disembowelled building that still jutted out a few yards from the side of the "Criterion," which rose like a vertical precipice beside him, without foothold or handhold that a squirrel could cling to. He was perhaps fifty feet from the ground. The width of the wall was, I suppose, a foot--just space enough for heel and toe to find standing-room. He was armed with a pick-axe, and with it he was cutting away the fragile buttress from underneath his feet. His body rose and fell with the strokes of the pick-axe. When he had loosened some portion of the wall, he would stand on one foot and scrape away the debris with the other. As it fell rattling to the ground a cloud of dust boiled up, smothering him and partially hiding him from view. Then he would turn to with the pick again, loosen another portion, and repeat the operation.

<sup>1</sup> The vacant site is now covered by a new block of buildings

I stood and watched him with respect bordering on admiration. I could not help reflecting what a helpless figure I should have cut in his place and what a short time I should be there. I have been proud of my modest achievements on the rocks, but here was a man who made those achievements seem silly, and he did it as unconcernedly as if he were hoeing potatoes in his garden. Presently he straightened his back, loosened his shoulders, paused, threw a glance up at the vertical cliff above him, and another down the vertical cliff below him, and then resumed.

So I saw him cut away row after row of the brickwork on which he stood. There was a drop of fifty feet, "straight as a beggar can spit," back and front of him—not an inch of room for the play of his feet. Every movement had to be true to the fraction of an inch. Every piece of brickwork he removed involved a new problem within the same inexorable limits. The slightest mistake, and he would plunge down to the rubbish below, and a coroner's jury would say "Accidental death," and that would be the end of his story. Perhaps there would be two lines about him at the bottom of a newspaper column, but nobody would read it, for everybody would be so busy reading how Mr. Kid Lewis put Mr. Frankie Burns to sleep, and how Abe Mitchell did the fourth hole in two, and why Hobbs or somebody else was not caught in the second over.

And this man, rising and falling with the blows of his pick-axe up there on the fragment of wall, is not doing this perilous job occasionally. He is doing it

every day. All his working life is spent on some such giddy task as this, swaying to and fro with his axe between a drop of fifty feet on one side and fifty feet on the other. He must never forget - for a moment. He must never be dizzy—for a moment. He must be prepared for any sudden gust of wind that blows. As I watched him he seemed to assume the proportions of a great artist. He seemed to become heroic—a figure carrying his life lightly on that frail ledge of the vertical cliff. I daresay it had never occurred to him to think of himself in either rôle. Yet the mere skill of the man was more delicate than the skill of the rather dull cricketers I saw at Lord's on Saturday. There were 12,000 people standing round hour by hour to watch Lee and Haig pile up the stupendous total of fifty runs inside two hours. I do not blame the spectators. I was one of them myself, and very dull I found it. But nobody bothered to give a glance at the figure swaying to and fro on the crumbling wall. Yet as a mere exhibition of skill it was not inferior to the pedestrian play at Lord's or to a skipping match between Carpentier and Dempsey at £1,000 a minute. And remember, he was not engaged in a sham fight. He had a drop of fifty feet back and front. Instant death on either side all the time.

But then he was only doing useful work. I wondered what he got for risking his life every hour of every day. Perhaps as much in a week or a month as *The Star* will pay me for writing this article about him. Perhaps as much in a year as an eminent counsel will pocket for a day's "refresher." Perhaps as much in

a lifetime as Monsieur Carpentier will take for ten minutes' running exercise with Dempsey in the ring, winding up with a tap in the stomach, a count-out, a handshake (and a wink). No; on second thoughts, not half that, not quarter that.

When I passed through Piccadilly Circus in the evening the man had gone. So had the fragment of wall on which he stood. You may see the mark of the place where the wall rose on the side of the "Criterion." It is the mark of an unknown artist to whom I offer this tribute of my admiration.

### ON BEING TIDY

ANY careful observer of my habits would know that I am on the eve of an adventure - a holiday, or a bankruptcy, or a fire, or a voluntary liquidation (whatever that may be), or an elopement, or a duel, or a conspiracy, or—in short, of something out of the normal, something romantic or dangerous, pleasurable or painful, interrupting the calm current of my affairs. Being the end of July, he would probably say: That fellow is on the brink of the holiday fever. He has all the symptoms of the epidemic. Observe his negligent, abstracted manner. Notice his slackness about business—how he just comes and looks in and goes out as though he were a visitor paying a call, or a person who had been left a fortune and didn't care twopence what happened. Observe his clothes, how they are burgeoning into unaccustomed

gaiety, even levity. Is not his hat set on at just a shade of a sporting angle? Does not his stick twirl with a hint of irresponsible emotions? Is there not the glint of far horizons in his eye? Did you not hear him humming as he came up the stairs? Yes, assuredly the fellow is going for a holiday.

Your suspicions would be confirmed when you found me ransacking my private room and clearing up my desk. The news that I am clearing up my desk has been an annual sensation for years. I remember a colleague of mine once coming in and finding me engaged in that spectacular feat. His face fell with apprehension. His voice faltered. "I hope you are not leaving us," he said. He, poor fellow, could not think of anything else that could account for so unusual an operation.

For I am one of those people who treat their desks with respect. We do not believe in worrying them about their contents. We do not bully them into disclosing their secrets. We stuff the drawers full of papers and documents, and leave them to mellow and ripen. And when the drawers are full we pile up other papers and documents on either side of us; and the higher the pile gets the more comfortable and cosy we feel. We would not disturb them for worlds. Why should we set our sleeping dogs barking at us when they are willing to go on sleeping if we leave them alone? And consider the show they make. No one coming to see us can fail to be impressed by such piles of documents. They realise how busy we are. They understand that we have no time for idle



talk. They see that we have all these papers to dispose of—otherwise, why are they there? They get their business done and go away quickly, and spread the news of what tremendous fellows we are for work. I am told by one who worked with him, that old Lord Strathcona knew the trick quite well, and used it unblushingly. When a visitor was announced he tumbled his papers about in imposing confusion and was discovered breasting the mighty ocean of his labours, his chin resolutely out of the water. But he was a supreme artist in this form of amiable imposture. On one occasion he was entertained at a great public dinner in a provincial city. In the midst of the proceedings a portly flunkey was observed carrying a huge envelope, with seals and trappings, on a salver. For whom was this momentous document intended? Ah, he has paused behind the grand old man with the wonderful snowy head. It is for him. The company looks on in respectful silence. Even here this astonishing old man cannot escape the cares of office. As he takes the envelope his neighbour at the table looks at the address. It was in Strathcona's own handwriting!

But we of the rank and file are not dishevelled by artifice, like this great man. It is a natural gift. And do not suppose that our disorder makes us unhappy. We like it. We follow our vocation, as Falstaff says. Some people are born tidy and some are born untidy. We were born untidy, and if good people, taking pity on us, try to make us tidy we get lost. It was so with George Crabbe. He lived in magnificent disorder, papers and books and letters all

over the floor, piled on every chair, surging up to the ceiling. Once, in his absence, his niece tidied up for him. When he came back he found himself like a stranger in a strange land. He did not know his way about in this desolation of tidiness, and he promptly restored the familiar disorder, so that he could find things. It sounds absurd, of course, but we people with a genius for untidiness must always seem absurd to the tidy people. They cannot understand that there is a method in our muddle, an order in our disorder, secret paths through the wilderness known only to our feet, that, in short, we are rather like cats whose perceptions become more acute the darker it gets. It is not true that we never find things. We often find things.

And consider the joy of finding things you don't hope to find. You, sir, sitting at your spotless desk, with your ordered and labelled shelves about you, and your files and your letter-racks, and your card indexes and your cross references, and your this, that, and the other—what do you know of the delights of which I speak? You do not come suddenly and ecstatically upon the thing you seek. You do not know the shock of delighted discovery. You do not shout "Eureka," and summon your family around you to rejoice in the miracle that has happened. No star swims into your ken out of the void. You cannot be said to find things at all, for you never lose them, and things must be lost before they can be truly found. The father of the Prodigal had to lose his son before he could experience the joy that has

become an immortal legend of the world. It is we who lose things, not you, sir, who never find them, who know the Feast of the Fatted Calf.

This is not a plea for untidiness. I am no hot gospeller of disorder. I only seek to make the best of a bad job, and to show that we untidy fellows are not without a case, have our romantic compensations, moments of giddy exaltation unknown to those who are endowed with the pedestrian and profitable virtue of tidiness. That is all. I would have the pedestrian virtue if I could. In other days, before I had given up hope of reforming myself, and when I used to make good resolutions as piously as my neighbours, I had many a spasm of tidiness. I looked with envy on my friend Higginson, who was a miracle of order, could put his hand on anything he wanted in the dark, kept his documents and his files and records like regiments of soldiers obedient to call, knew what he had written on 4 March, 1894, and what he had said on 10 January, 1901, and had a desk that simply perspired with tidiness. And in a spirit of emulation I bought a roll-top desk. I believed that tidiness was a purchasable commodity. You went to a furniture dealer and bought a large roll-top desk, and when it came home the genius of order came home with it. The bigger the desk, the more intricate its devices, the larger was the measure of order bestowed on you. My desk was of the first magnitude. It had an inconceivable wealth of drawers and pigeon-holes. It was a desk of many mansions. And I labelled them all, and gave them all separate jobs to perform.

And then I sat back and looked the future boldly in the face. Now, said I, the victory is won. Chaos and old night are banished. Order reigns in Warsaw. I have but to open a drawer and every secret I seek will leap magically to light. My articles will write themselves, for every reference will come to my call, obedient as Ariel to the bidding of Prospero.

“Approach, my Ariel; come,”

I shall say, and from some remote fastness the obedient spirit will appear with-

“All hail, great master; grave sir, hail! I come  
To answer thy best pleasure; be't to fly,  
To swim, to dive into the sea, to ride  
On the curl'd clouds.”

I shall know where Aunt Jane's letters are, and where my bills are, and my cuttings about this, that, and the other, and my diaries and notebooks, and the time-table and the street guide. I shall never be short of a match or a spare pair of spectacles, or a pencil, or—in short, life will henceforth be an easy amble to old age. For a week it worked like a charm. Then the demon of disorder took possession of the beast. It devoured everything and yielded up nothing. Into its soundless deeps my merchandise sank to oblivion. And I seemed to sink with it. It was not a desk, but a tomb. One day I got a man to take it away to a second-hand shop.

Since then I have given up being tidy. I have realised that the quality of order is not purchasable at furniture shops, is not a quality of external things,

but an indwelling spirit, a frame of mind, a habit that perhaps may be acquired but cannot be bought. I have a smaller desk with fewer drawers, all of them nicely choked up with the litter of the past. Once a year I have a gaol delivery of the incarcerated. The ghosts come out into the daylight, and I face them unflinching and unafraid. They file past, pointing minatory fingers at me as they go into the waste-paper basket. They file past now. But I do not care a dump; for to-morrow I shall seek fresh woods and pastures new. To-morrow the ghosts of that old untidy desk will have no terrors for my emancipated spirit.

### ON THE VANITY OF OLD AGE

I MET an old gentleman, a handsome and vigorous old gentleman, with whom I have a slight acquaintance, in the lane this morning, and he asked me whether I remembered Walker of *The Daily News*. No, said I, he was before my time. He resigned the editorship, I thought, in the 'seventies.

"Before that," said the old gentleman. "Must have been in the 'sixties."

"Probably," I said. "Did you know him in the 'sixties?"

"Oh, I knew him before then," said the old gentleman, warming to his subject. "I knew him in the 'forties."

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I took a step backwards in respectful admiration. The old gentleman enjoyed this instinctive testimony to the impression he had made.

"Heavens!" said I, "the 'forties!"

"No," said the old gentleman, half closing his eyes, as if to get a better view across the ages. "No. . . . It must have been in the 'thirties. . . . Yes, it was in the 'thirties. We were boys at school together in the 'thirties. We called him Sawney Walker."

I fell back another step. The old gentleman's triumph was complete. I had paid him the one compliment that appealed to him—the compliment of astonished incredulity at the splendour of his years.

His age was his glory, and he loved to bask in it. He had scored ninety not out, and with his still robust frame and clear eye he looked "well set" for his century. And he was as honourably proud of his performance as, seventy or eighty years ago, he would have been of making his hundred at the wickets. The genuine admiration I had for his achievement was mixed with enjoyment at his own obvious delight in it. An innocent vanity is the last of our frailties to desert us. It will be the last infirmity that humanity will outgrow. In the great controversy that rages around Dean Inge's depressing philosophy I am on the side of the angels. I want to feel that we are progressing somewhere, that we are moving upwards in the scale of creation, and not merely whizzing round and round and biting our tail. I think the case for the ascent of man is

stronger than the Dean admits., A creature that has emerged from the primordial slime and evolved a moral law has progressed a good way. It is not unreasonable to think that he has a future. Give him time - and it may be that the world is still only in its rebellious childhood - and he will go far.

But however much we are destined to grow in grace, I do not conceive a time when we shall have wholly shed our vanity. It is the most constant and tenacious of our attributes. The child is vain of his first knickerbockers, and the Court flunkey is vain of his knee-breeches. We are vain of noble things and ignoble things. The Squire is as vain of his acres as if he made them, and Jim Ruddle carries his head high all the year round in virtue of the notorious fact that all the first prizes at the village flower-show go to his onions and potatoes, his carrots and his cabbages. There is none of us so poor as to escape. A friend of mine who, in a time of distress, had been engaged in distributing boots to the children at a London school, heard one day a little child pattering behind her in very squeaky boots. She suspected it was one of the beneficiaries "keeping up" with her. She turned and recognised the wearer. "So you've got your new boots on, Mary?" she said. "Yes," said little Mary grandly. "Don't they squeak beautiful, mum." And though, as we grow older, we cease to glory in the squeakiness of squeaky boots, we find other material to keep the flame of vanity alive. "What for should I ride in a carriage if the guid folk of Dunfermline dinna see me?" said the

Fifer, putting his head out of the window. He spoke for all of us. We are all a little like that. I confess that I cannot ride in a motor-car that whizzes past other motor-cars without an absurd and irrational vanity. I despise the emotion, but it is there in spite of me. And I remember that when I was young I could hardly free-wheel down a hill on a bicycle without feeling superior to the man who was grinding his way up with heavings and perspiration. I have no shame in making these absurd confessions, for I am satisfied that you, sir (or madam), will find in them, if you listen hard, some quite audible echo of yourself.

And when we have ceased to have anything else to be vain about we are vain of our years. We are as proud of having been born before our neighbours as we used to be of throwing the hammer farther than our neighbours. We are like the old maltster in *Far from the Madding Crowd*, when Henry Fray claimed to be "a strange old piece, goodmen."

"A strange old piece, ye say!" interposed the maltster in a querulous voice. "Ye be no old man worth naming—no old man at all. Yer teeth bain't half gone yet; and what's a old man's standing if so be his teeth bain't gone? Weren't I stale in wedlock afore ye were out of arms? 'Tis a poor thing to be sixty when there's people far past fourscore—a boast weak as water."

It was the unvarying custom in Weatherbury to sink all minor differences when the maltster had to be pacified.

"Weak as water, yes," said Jan Coggan. "Malter, we feel ye to be a wonderful veteran man, and nobody can gainsay it."



"Nobody," said Joseph Poorgrass. "Ye be a very rare old spectacle, malter, and we all respect ye for that gift."

That's it. When we haven't anything else to boast about we glory in being "a very rare old spectacle." We count the reigns we've lived in and exalt the swingebucklers of long ago when we, too, heard the chimes at midnight. Sometimes the vanity of years begins to develop quite early, as in the case of Henry Fray. There is the leading instance of Cicero who was only in his fifties when he began to idealise himself as an old man and wrote his *De Senectute*, exalting the pleasures of old age. In the eyes of the maltster he would never have been an old man worth naming, for he was only sixty-four when he was murdered. I have noticed in my own case of late a growing tendency to flourish my antiquity. I find the same naive pleasure in recalling the 'seventies to those who can remember, say, only the 'nineties, that my fine old friend in the lane had in talking to me about the 'thirties. I met two nice boys the other day at a country house, and they were full, as boys ought to be, of the subject of cricket. And when they found I was worth talking to on that high theme, they submitted their ideal team to me for approval, and I launched out about the giants that lived in the days before Agamemnon Hobbs. I recalled the mighty deeds of "W. G." and Spofforth, William Gunn and Ulyett, A. P. Lucas and A. G. Steel, and many another hero of my youth. And I can promise you that their stature did not lose in the

telling. I found I was as vain of those memories as the maltster was of having lost all his teeth. I dare say I shall be proud when I have lost all my teeth, too. For Nature is a cunning nurse. She gives us lollipops all the way, and when the lollipop of hope and the lollipop of achievement are done, she gently inserts in our toothless gums the lollipop of remembrance. And with that pleasant vanity we are soothed to sleep.

### FLEET STREET NO MORE

TO-DAY I am among the demobilised. I have put off the harness of a lifetime and am a person at large. For me, Fleet Street is a tale that is told, a rumour on the wind; a memory of far-off things and battles long ago. At this hour I fancy it is getting into its nightly paroxysm. There is the thunder of machinery below, the rattle of linotypes above, the click-click-click of the tape machine, the tapping of telegraph operators, the tinkling of telephones, the ringing of bells for messengers who tarry, reporters coming in with "stories" or without "stories," leader-writers writing for dear life and wondering whether they will beat the clock and what will happen if they don't, night editors planning their pages as a shopman dresses his shop window, sub-editors breasting the torrent of "fimsies" that flows in from the ends of

the earth with tidings of this, that, and the other. I hear the murmur of it all from afar as a disembodied spirit might hear the murmurs of the life it has left behind. And I feel much as a policeman must feel when, pensioned and in plain clothes, he walks the Strand submerged in the crowd, his occupation gone, his yoke lifted, his glory departed. But yesterday he was a man having authority. There in the middle of the surging current of traffic he took his stand, the visible embodiment of power, behind him the sanctions of the law and the strong arm of justice. He was a very Moses of a man. He raised his hand and the waters stayed; he lowered his hand and the waters flowed. He was a personage. He was accosted by anybody and obeyed by everybody. He could stop Sir Gorgius Midas' Rolls-Royce to let the nurse-maid cross the street. He could hold converse with the nobility as an equal and talk to the cook through the area railings without suspicion of impropriety. His cloud of dignity was held from falling by the pillars of the Constitution, and his truncheon was as indisputable as a field-marshal's baton.

And now he is even as one of the crowd that he had ruled, a saunterer on the side-walk, an unknown, a negligible wayfarer. No longer can he make a pathway through the torrent of the Strand for the nurse-maid to walk across dryshod; no longer can he hold equal converse with ex-Ministers. Even "J. B.," who has never been known to pass a policeman without a gossip, would pass him, unconscious that he was a man who had once lived under a helmet

and waved an august arm like a semaphore in Piccadilly Circus; perhaps even stood like one of the Pretorian Guard at the gates or in the halls of Westminster. But the pathos of all this vanished magnificence is swallowed up in one consuming thought He is free, independent, the captain of his soul, the master of his own motions. He can no longer stop all the buses in the Strand by a wave of his hand, but he can get in any bus he chooses. He can go to Balham, or Tooting, or Ealing, or Nine Elms, or any place he fancies. Or he can look in the shop windows, or turn into the "pictures" or go home to tea. He can light his pipe whenever he has a mind to. He can lie in bed as long as he pleases. He can be indifferent to the clock. He has soared to a realm where the clock has no terrors. It may point to anything it likes without stirring his pulse. It may strike what it pleases and he will not care.

And now I share his liberty. I, too, can snap my fingers at the clock and take any bus I like to anywhere I like. For long years that famous thoroughfare from Temple Bar to Ludgate Hill has been familiar to me as my own shadow. I have lived in the midst of its eager, jostling life until I have seemed to be a cell of its multitudinous being. I have heard its chimes at midnight, as Squire Shallow heard them with the swanking swashbucklers of long ago, and have felt the pulse of its unceasing life during every hour of the twenty-four—in the afternoon when the pavements are thronged and the be-wigged barristers are crossing to-and-fro between the Temple and the

Law Courts, and the air is shrill with the cries of the newsboys; in the evening when the tide of the day's life has ebbed, and the Street has settled down to work, and the telegraph boys flit from door to door with their tidings of the world's happenings; in the small hours when the great lorries come thundering up the side streets with their mountains of papers and rattle through the sleeping city to the railway termini; at dawn, when the flag of morn in sovereign state floats over the dome of the great Cathedral that looks down so grandly from the summit of the hill beyond. "I see et arl so plainly as I saw et, long ago." I have worn its paving stones as industriously as Johnson wore them. I have dipped into its secrecies as one who had the run of the estate and the free-man's right. I have known its *habitués* as familiarly as if they had belonged to my own household, and its multitudinous courts and inns and taverns, and have drunk the solemn toast with the Whitefriars o' Friday nights, and taken counsel with the lawyers in the Temple, and wandered in its green and cloistered calm in the hot afternoons, and written thousands of leaders and millions of words on this, that, and the other, wise words and foolish words, and words without any particular quality at all, except that they filled up space, and have had many friendships and fought many battles, winning some and losing others, and have seen the generations go by and the young fellows grow into old fellows who scan a little severely the new race of ardent boys that come along so gaily to the enchanted street and are

doomed to grow old and weary in its service also. And at the end it has come to be a street of ghosts—a street of memories, with faces that I knew lurking in its shadows and peopling its rooms and mingling with the moving pageant that seems like a phantom too.

Now the chapter is closed and I have become a memory with the rest. Like the Chambered Nautilus I

. . . seal up the idle door,  
Stretch in my new-found home and know the old no more.

I may stroll down it some day as a visitor from the country and gape at its wonders and take stock of its changes. But I wear its chains no more. No more shall the pavement of Fleet Street echo to my punctual footsteps. No more shall I ring in vain for that messenger who had always "gone out to supper, sir," or been called to the news-room or sent on an errand. No more shall I cower nightly before that tyrannous clock that ticked so much faster than I wrote. The galley proofs will come down from above like snow, but I shall not con them. The tumults of the world will boil in like the roar of many waters, but I shall not hear them. For I have come into the inheritance of leisure. Time, that has lorded it over me so long, is henceforth my slave, and the future stretches before me like an infinite green pasture in which I can wander till the sun sets. I shall let the legions thunder by while I tend my bees and water my plants, and mark how my celery grows and how the apples ripen.

And if, perchance, as I sit under a tree with an old book, or in the chimney-corner before a chessboard, there comes to me one from the great noisy world, inviting me to return to Fleet Street, I shall tell him a tale. One day (I shall say) Wang Ho, the wise Chinese, was in his orchard when there came to him from the distant capital two envoys, bearing an urgent prayer that he would return and take his old place in the Government. He ushered them into his house and listened gravely to their plea. Then, without a word, he turned, went to a basin of water, took a sponge *and washed out his ears.*

### ON SIGHTING LAND

I WAS in the midst of an absorbing game of chess when a cry brought me to my feet with a leap. My opponent had sprung to his feet too. He was a doughty fellow, who wore a wisp of hair on his baldish forehead, and had trained it to stand up like a sardonic Mephistophelian note of interrogation. "I offer you a draw," I said with a regal wave of the hand, as though I was offering him Czecho-Slovakia or Jugo-Slavia, or something substantial like that. "Accepted," he cried with a gesture no less reckless and comprehensive. And then we bolted for the top deck. For the cry we had heard was "Land in sight!" And if there are three more comfortable words to

hear when you have been tossing about on the ocean for a week or two, I do not know them.

For now that I am safely ashore I do not mind confessing that the Atlantic is a dull place. I used to think that Oscar Wilde was merely facetious when he said he was "disappointed with the Atlantic." But now I am disposed to take the remark more seriously. In a general, vague way I knew it was a table-top. We do not have to see these things in order to know what they are like. Le Brun-Pindare did not see the ocean until he was a middle-aged man, but he said that the sight added little to his conception of the sea because "we have in us the glance of the universe." But though the actual experience of the ocean adds little to the broad imaginative conception of it formed by the mind, we are not prepared for the effect of sameness, still less for the sense of smallness. It is as though we are sitting day after day in the geometrical centre of a very round table-top.

The feeling of motion is defeated by that unchanging horizon. You are told that the ship made 396 knots the day before yesterday and 402 yesterday, but there is nothing that gives credibility to the fact, for volition to be felt must have something to be measured by and here there is nothing. You are static on the table-top. It is perfectly flat and perfectly round, with an edge as hard as a line drawn by compasses. You feel that if you got to the edge you would have "a drop into nothing beneath you, as straight as a beggar can spit." You conceive



yourself snatching as you fall at the folds of the table-cloth which hangs over the sides

For there is a cloth to this table top a cloth that changes its appearance with ceaseless unrest. Sometimes it is a very dark blue cloth with white spots that burst out here and there like an eruption of transient snow. Sometimes it is a green cloth, sometimes a grey cloth, sometimes a brownish cloth. Occasionally the cloth looks smooth and tranquil but now and then a wind seems to get between it and the table, and then it becomes wrinkled and turbulent like a table cloth flinging itself about in a delirious sleep. In some moods it becomes an incomparable spectacle of terror and power almost human in its passion and intensity. The ship reels and rolls, and pitches and slides under the impact and withdrawal of the waves that leave it at one moment suspended in air at the next engulfed in blinding surges. It is like a wrestler fighting desperately to keep his feet panting and groaning every joint creaking and every muscle cracking with the frightful strain. A gleam of sunshine breaks through the grey sky, and catching the clouds of spray turns them to rainbow hues that envelop the reeling ship with the glamour of a magic world. Then the gleam passes and there is nothing but the raging torment of the waters, the groaning wrestler in their midst, and far off a vibrant ray of sunlight touching the horizon as if with a pencil of white flame, to a spectral and unearthly beauty.

But whether tranquil or turbulent the effect is

the same. We are 'moveless in the centre of the flat, unchanging circle of things. Our magic carpet (or table cloth) may be taking us on a trip to America or Europe as the case may be but so far as our senses are concerned we are standing still for ever and ever. There is nothing that registers progress to the mind. The circle we looked out on last night is indistinguishable from the circle we look out on this morning. Even the sky and cloud effects are lost on this flat contracted stage, with its dead horizon and its thwarted vision. There is a curious absence of the sense of distance even of distance in cloudland for the sky ends as abruptly as the sea at that severely drawn circumference and there is no vague merging of the seen into the unseen which alone gives the imagination room for flight. To live in this world is to be imprisoned in a double sense—in the physical sense that Johnson had in mind in his famous retort and in the emotional sense that I have attempted to describe. In my growing list of undesirable occupations—seamen, lift men, stokers, tram conductors, and so on—I shall henceforth include ships' stewards on ocean routes. To spend one's life in being shot like a shuttle in a loom across the Atlantic from Plymouth to New York and back from New York to Plymouth, to be the sport of all the ill humour of the ocean and to play the sick nurse to a never-ending mob of strangers, is as dreary a part as one could be cast for. I would rather navigate a barge on the Regent Canal or run a night coffee stall in the Gray's Inn Road. And yet, on second thoughts, they have

their joys. They hear, every fortnight or so, that thrilling cry, "Land in sight!"

• It is a cry that can never fail to stir the pulse, whatever the land and however familiar it may be. The vision is always fresh, and full of wonder. Take a familiar example. Who, crossing the Channel after however short an absence, can catch the first glimpse of the white cliffs of Dover without the surge of some unsuspected emotion within him? He sees England anew, objectively, comprehensively, as something thrown on a screen, and in that moment seizes it, feels it, loves it with a sudden freshness and illumination. Or, take the unfamiliar. That wavy line that breaks at last the monotonous rim of the ocean, is that indeed America? You see it with the emotion of the first adventurers into this untamed wilderness of the sea. Such a cloud appeared one day on the horizon to Columbus. Three hundred years ago, on such a day as this, perhaps, the straining eyes of that immortal little company of the *Mayflower* caught sight of the land where they were to plant the seed of so mighty a tree. And all down through the centuries that cry of "Land in sight!" has been sounded in the ears of generations of exiles chasing each other across the waste to the new land of hope and promise. It would be a dull soul who could see that land shaping itself on the horizon without a sense of the great drama of the ages.

But of all first sights of land there is none so precious to English eyes as those little islands of the sea that lie there to port on this sunny morning.

And of all times when that vision is grateful to the sight there is none to compare with this Christmas Eve. I find myself heaving with a hitherto unsuspected affection for the Scilly Islanders. I have a fleeting vision of becoming a Scilly Islander myself, settling down there amid a glory of golden daffodils, keeping a sharp look-out to sea, and standing on some dizzy headland to shout the good news of home to the Ark that is for ever coming up over the rim of the ocean.

I daresay the Scilly Islander does nothing so foolish. I daresay he is a rather prosaic person, who has no thought of the dazzling vision his hills hold up to the voyager from afar. No matter where that voyager comes from, whether across the Atlantic from America or up the Atlantic from the Cape, or round the Cape from Australia, or through the Mediterranean from India, this is the first glimpse of the homeland that greets him, carrying his mind on over hill and dale, till it reaches the journey's end. And that vision links him up with the great pageant of history. Drake, sailing in from the Spanish Main, saw these islands, and knew he was once more in his Devon seas. I fancy I see him on the deck beside me with a wisp of hair, curled and questioning, on his baldish forehead, and I mark the shine in his eyes. . . .

## ON AN ELDERLY PERSON

AFTER a long walk through Richmond Park and by the Thames one afternoon recently, I went with a companion into a refreshment-place for tea. As we waited for service there entered a tall, stout, elderly gentleman in a tall hat. He took a seat at a table not far off. The face seemed familiar to me, notably the heavy under-jaw that projected with a formidable air of determination. I ransacked my memory a moment, and the identity of the stout, elderly gentleman came back to me vividly. I drew my companion's attention to him, and then raised the second finger of my right hand on which the bone between the first and second joints was palpably enlarged. "That," I said, "is a little memorial which that gentleman in the tall hat gave me forty years ago. He was a good bowler in those days, straight and fast, and a good length, but he had a trick of getting up badly, and when he hit you he hit you hard. One day he hit me in practice when I was playing without a glove, and this is his signature."

But it was not this memory that made the elderly gentleman chiefly interesting to me. It was the fact that he was elderly—so flagrantly elderly. The last time I had seen him he was a stalwart young fellow, quick in his movements, with his head and body thrust a little forward as though his legs could not quite keep pace with his purpose, and with that

formidable chin sticking out as it were in challenge to the future. Now he would have passed for an alderman, "in fair round belly." He moved heavily and slowly like one who had reached whatever goal he had set out after and had no more use for that determined under-jaw. In looking at him I seemed to see myself in a mirror. I must be elderly like that, too. If he were to recognise me as I had recognised him he, no doubt, would be as surprised as I had been to find what an elderly person I had grown into since the days when I was a fresh-coloured youth and we played cricket together.

It is by these reflected lights that the havoc which the years play with us is visible to us. The approach of age is so stealthy that we do not perceive it in ourselves. Others grow old, but we live on under the illusion of unchanging youth. There may be a bald patch on the head; but that is nothing. Quite young fellows have bald patches on the head. That eminent lawyer, Mr. Billson Stork, was bald at twenty-five, and at thirty-five had not a hair above his ears. No, baldness is no evidence. Nor are grey hairs evidence. We all know people who were grey-headed in their early manhood. It is true that we do not run now as we used; but that is simply because we do not want to run. What is there to run for? All these things are discounted by the dissimulating spirit that dwells in us and refuses to let us know that we are visibly taking our place among the old fellows.

Then some incident like that I have described dissipates momentarily the pleasant illusion that

defies the calendar. Perhaps someone in the bus, full of good intentions, offers you his seat. You are glad of the seat and you appreciate the kindness, but your feelings are complicated by the suggestion that you bear about you the stigmata of decrepitude. You have become a person whose venerable years entitle you to consideration. You realise, almost with a shock, that to the eyes of that admirable young man in the bus you are an old gentleman whom it would be indecent to leave hanging on to a strap. It is a disillusioning experience, and if the young man could read your mind he would probably conclude that the higher courtesy would have been to keep his seat and leave you your comfortable fancy. There are cases when politeness cuts deeper than impertinence. I myself saw an illustration of this in a bus only yesterday, when a young fellow rose to make room for a very stout lady, although there was a vacant seat beside him. It is true that the stout lady really needed two seats, but she did not want the fact proclaimed in that public way, and her anxiety to point out to the young man that there was still a vacant seat showed that the stout as well as the elderly can nurse illusions about themselves.

But it is in his own family that the sharpest reminders of the cold truth are borne in upon the elderly. There was a time, it does not seem long ago, when you were an Olympian to your children, when the cloud on your brow had the authority of Jove, and the lightest word on your lips was a Delphic oracle. That phase passed insensibly. You began to

measure yourself in your slippers with the new generation. You began to discover that they could wear your boots, and then that they could not wear your boots. A little later and you knew that you had come down from Olympus altogether, and that these young people had ideas which were not your ideas, that they belonged to a new world which was not your old, unchallenged world. They had ceased to be your children and had become something like brothers and sisters. All this accomplished itself so quietly, so naturally, that you did not notice it.

Then, one day, something happens, a trifling action, it may be, a trifling word, an accent, a gesture, but it is enough. It lifts the curtain of your fiction. You know that you have changed places with the children of yester-year. They are no longer your children. They have ceased even to be your brothers and sisters. They are becoming a sort of maiden aunt or benevolent uncle. You realise that to them you have become something of an antiquity, a person who must be humoured because of his enormous past and his exiguous future. You feel that if you are not careful you will be invited to take somebody's arm to steady you. You suspect that your ways are the source of amusement, respectful but undisguised, like the ways of a rather wayward child. In short, you learn that you are no longer the young fellow you have imagined yourself to be, but an elderly person, like any other elderly person of your years. It is not an unpleasant discovery. It may even be a pleasant discovery. And in any case it is only a



passing spasm. The indomitable youth within soon puts the revelation aside. I suspect that he never really does grow elderly, no matter what tales the vesture of decay in which he is clothed may tell about him to the outside world.

### ON BIG WORDS

I WAS cutting down the nettles by the hedge with a bill-hook when a small man with spectacles, a straw hat, a white alpaca jacket, and a book under his arm came up, stopped, and looked on. I said "Good evening," and he said "Good evening." Then, pointing to my handiwork, he remarked:

"You find the nettles very difficult to eradicate?"

I said I found them hard to keep down.

"They disseminate themselves most luxuriantly," he said.

I replied that they spread like the dickens.

"But they have their utility in the economy of Nature," he said.

I replied that Nature was welcome to them as far as I was concerned.

He then remarked that it was most salubrious weather, and I agreed that it had been a fine day. But he was afraid, he said, that the aridity of the season was deleterious to the crops, and I replied that my potatoes were doing badly. After that, I

think, it occurred to him that we did not speak the same language, and with another "Good evening" he passed on and I returned to the attack on the nettles.

It is an excellent thing to have a good vocabulary, but one ought not to lard one's common speech or everyday letters with long words. It is like going out for a walk in the fields with a silk hat, a frock-coat, and patent leather boots. No reasonable person could enjoy the country in such a garb. He would feel like a blot on the landscape. He would be as much out of place as a guest in a smock-frock at a Buckingham Palace garden-party. And familiar conversation that dresses itself up in silk-hatted words is no less an offence against the good taste of things. We do not make a thing more impressive by clothing it in grand words any more than we crack a nut more neatly by using a sledge-hammer. We only distract attention from the thought to the clothes it wears. If we are wise our wisdom will gain from the simplicity of our speech, and if we are foolish our folly will only shout the louder through big words.

Take for example that remark of Dr. Johnson's about the swallows. "Swallows certainly sleep all the winter," he said. "A number of them conglobulate together, by flying round and round, and then all in a heap throw themselves under water and lie in the bed of a river." It was a foolish belief, but it would be unfair to scoff at Johnson for not being better informed than his contemporaries. It is that bump-tious word "conglobulate" that does for him. It looks

so learned and knowing that it calls attention to the absurdity like a college cap on a donkey's ears.

A fine use of words does not necessarily mean the use of fine words. That was the mistake which Humpty-Dumpty made in *Alice in Wonderland*. He thought that "impenetrability" was such a magnificent word that it would leave Alice speechless and amazed. Many writers are like that. When the reporter says that So-and-So "manipulated the ivories" (meaning that he had played the billiard balls into position), or that So-and-So "propelled the sphere" (meaning that he had kicked the football), he feels that he has got out of the rut of common speech when in fact he has exchanged good words for counterfeit coin. That is not the way of the masters of language. They do not vulgarise fine words. They glorify simple words, as in Milton's description of the winged host:

Far off their coming shone . . .

Quite ordinary words employed with a certain novelty and freshness can wear a distinction that gives them not only significance but a strange and haunting beauty. I once illustrated the point by showing the effects which the poets, and particularly Wordsworth and Keats, extract from the word "quiet." Shakespeare could perform equal miracles with the trivial word "sweet," which he uses with a subtle beauty that makes it sing like a violin in the hands of a master. Who can be abroad in the sunshine and singing of these spring days without that

phrase, "the sweet o' the year," carolling like a bird in the mind. It is not a "jewel five words long." It is a dewdrop from the very mint of Nature. But, Shakespeare could perform this magic with any old word. Take "flatter." A plain, home-spun word, you would say, useful for the drudgery of speech but nothing more. Then Shakespeare takes it in hand, and it shines bright as Sirius in the midnight sky:

Full many a glorious morning have I seen  
Flatter the mountain tops with sovran eye.

I once wanted to use for purposes of quotation a familiar stanza of Burns, but one word, the vital word, escaped me. I give the stanza, with the word I lacked missing:

To make a happy fireside clime  
For weans and wife—  
That's the true and sublime  
Of human life.

You, perhaps, know the missing word; but I could not recall it. I tried all the words that were serviceable, and each seemed banal and commonplace. I dare not, for shame, mention the words I tried to use as patches for Burns. When I turned up the poem and found that poignant word "pathos," I knew the measure of my failure to draw the poet's bow.

We carry big words in our head for the expression of our ideas, and short words in our heart for the expression of our emotions. Whenever we speak the language of true feeling, it is our mother tongue that

comes to our lips. It is equal to any burden. Take the familiar last stanza of Wordsworth's "Three years she grew in sun and shower":

Thus Nature spake—the work was done—  
How soon my Lucy's race was run!  
She died, and left to me  
This heath, thus calm and quiet scene;  
The memory of what has been,  
And never more will be.

It is so simple that a child might have said it, and so charged with emotion that a man might be forgiven if he could not say it. *A Shropshire Lad* is full of this surge of feeling dressed in home-spun, as when he says:

Into my heart an air that kills  
From yon far country blows:  
What are those blue remembered hills,  
What spires, what farms are those?

That is the land of lost content,  
I see it shining plain,  
The happy highways where I went  
And cannot come again.

Even in pictorial description the most thrilling effects, as in the case I have quoted from Milton, are produced not by the pomp of words but by the passion of words. In two rapid, breathless lines:

The sun's rim dips, the stars rush out,  
With one stride comes the dark,

Coleridge flashes on the mind all the beauty and wonder of the tropic night. And though Shakespeare,

like Milton and Wordsworth, could use the grand words when the purpose was rhetorical or decorative, he did not go to them for the expression of the great things of life. Then he speaks with what Raleigh calls the bare intolerable force of King Lear's:

Do not laugh at me,  
For as I am a man, I think this lady  
To be my child Cordelia.

The higher the theme rises the more simple and austere becomes the speech, until the words seem like nerves bared and quivering to the agony of circumstance:

*Lear.* And my poor fool is hanged! No, no, no life!  
Why should a dog, a horse, a rat, have life,  
And thou no breath at all? Thou'lt come no more,  
Never, never, never, never, never!  
Pray you, undo this button. Thank you, sir.—  
Do you see this? Look on her, look, her lips,—  
Look there, look there! [*He dies.*]  
*Edgar.* He faints! My lord, my lord!—  
*Kent.* Break, heart; I prithee, break!  
*Edgar.* Look up, my lord.  
*Kent.* Vex not his ghost: O let him pass! he hates him  
That would upon the rack of this tough world  
Stretch him out longer.

The force of words can no further go. And my friend in the white alpaca jacket will notice that they are all very little ones.

## ON LIVING FOR EVER

FOR some time past I have noticed on the hoardings of London a placard illustrated with the picture of an American gentleman named Rutherford, who is represented lifting a prophetic fist in the manner of the advertisements of Horatio Bottomley before that prophet of the war had the misfortune to be found out, and declaring that there are "thousands in this city who will never die." I have not had the curiosity to attend his meetings or to inquire into the character of his revelation. I do not know, therefore, whether I am likely to be one of the people whom Mr. Rutherford has his eye upon. But the threat which he holds over my head has led me to look the possibility in the face. I suppose Mr. Rutherford is satisfied that it is an agreeable possibility. He would not have come all the way from America to tell us about it if he had not thought it was good news that he was bringing.

I think he is mistaken. Judging from my own reactions, as the Americans would say, to his prophecy, I fancy the general feeling would not be one of joy but of terror. If anything could reconcile us to the thought of death it would be the assurance that we should never die. For the pleasure as well as the pathos of life springs from the knowledge of its transitoriness.

All beauteous things for which we live  
By laws of time and space decay.  
But O, the very reason why  
I clasp them is because they die.

All our goings and comings are enriched with the sense of mortality. All our experiences are coloured by the thought that they may return no more. Rob us of the significance of the last words of Hamlet and the realm of poetry would become a desert, treeless and songless. It is because "the rest is silence" that the smallest details of our passage through life have in them the power of kindling thoughts such as these:

Sweet Chance, that led my steps abroad,  
 Beyond the town, where wild flowers grow --  
 A rainbow and a cuckoo, Lord,  
 How rich and great the times are now!  
 Know, all ye sheep  
 And cows, that keep  
 On staring that I stand so long  
 In grass that's wet from heavy rain --  
 A rainbow and a cuckoo's song  
 May never come together again;  
 May never come  
 This side the tomb.

It is not alone the beauty of the sunset that touches us with such poignant emotion: it is because in the passing of the day we see the image of another passing to which we move as unfalteringly as the sun moves into the shadow of the night. When in these autumn days we walk in the woodlands amid the patter of the falling leaves it is the same subtle suggestion that attunes the note of beauty to a minor key. Through the stillness of the forest there echo the strokes of a distant axe felling some kingly beech. For seventy,



perhaps a hundred, years it has weathered the storms of life, and now its hour has come and in its falling there is the allegory of ourselves. I think it is that allegory that makes my neighbour so passionately conservative about his trees. They stand too thick about his grounds, but he will not have the axe laid to one of them.

We cannot go an unusual journey without a dim sense of another journey from which we shall not return, nor say a prolonged "good-bye" without the faint echo in our minds of ultimate farewells. And who ever left the old house that has sheltered him so long and grown so familiar to sight and touch without feeling some shadow pass across the spirit that is more than the shadow cast by bricks and mortar? Life is crowded with these premonitions and forebodings that make our pleasures richer by reminding us that they are terminable.

And such is the perversity of human nature that if Mr. Rutherford should turn out to be well-informed, those of us who are marked down for deathlessness would find that the pleasure of life had vanished with its pathos. We should be panic-stricken at the idea of never coming to an end, of never being able to escape from what Chesterfield called "this silly world" and Salisbury "this miserable life." We should yearn for death as the condemned prisoner yearns for life or the ice-bound whaler for the spring. We do not want to die now, but to be comfortable we want to know that we shall die some day. Being under sentence of death we cling to life like limpets

to a rock, but if we were sentenced to life we should shriek for the promise of death. We should hate the sunset that we were doomed to see for ever and ever, and loathe the autumn that mocked us with its falling leaves.

I remember that in one of her letters Lady Mary Wortley Montagu remarks that she is so happy that she regrets that she cannot live three hundred years. We all have moments like that, moments when life seems so good that we envy the patriarchs and would be glad if we could abide here longer than Nature permits. But in our gayest moments we could not contemplate the prospect of seeing in the New Year of, let us say, A.D. 10024, with the certainty that we were destined to wait on for the New Year of A.D. 100024, and soon to the crack of doom. The mind would reel before such an enormous vista. We should stagger and faint at the prospect of a journey that had no end and of a future as limitless and unthinkable as space. We should look into the darkness and be afraid. There may be an infinite destiny for us to which this life is only a preparatory school. It is not unreasonable to think it is so—that when this fitful fever is over we may pass out into realms and into a state of being in which the muddle of this strange episode will be resolved. But here we are finite. Here we have no abiding city and all our feelings are conditioned by finite terms. We are rather like the batsman at the wicket. He does not want to get out. When he has made his 50 he strives to make his 100, and when he has made his 100, he is just as anxious to make 200.

But it is the knowledge that the innings will end, that every ball may be his last, that gives zest to the game. If he knew that he never could get out, that by an inexorable decree he was to be at the wicket for the rest of his days, he would turn round and knock the stumps down in desperation.

No, Mr. Rutherford, you have mistaken us. We do not want your revelation. The play is worth seeing, though I wish it were more good-humoured and the players a little more friendly; but we do not wish to watch it for ever. We like to know that the curtain will fall and that, a little weary and sleepy, we shall be permitted to go home. We are in no hurry, sir, but we like to know that the curtain is there.

## DREAM JOURNEYS

I HAD a singular dream last night. I found myself on Robinson Crusoe's Island and, curiously enough, in Robinson Crusoe's rôle. In the bright sunshine, by the sea-shore, I was turning over the stores of eatables, chiefly bags of potatoes, it seemed to me, that were lying about. There was abundance to go on with and I did not feel at all disturbed at the prospect of not being called for for many a long day. I was alone, but without the sense of solitude. Indeed, I was entirely happy and free from care. I feel, even now that I am awake, the glow of the

warm sunshine and the peace of the sands and the sea. Most dreams are easily traceable to some waking circumstance, and this quite enjoyable spiritual experience was, I suppose, due to a conversation I had had about Honolulu and my regret that I was never likely to see the islands of the Pacific. The friendly spirit who has charge of my dreams evidently took the hint and wafted me away to Juan Fernandez. I am half-disposed, so pleasant is the memory, to regret that he did not leave me there, wrapped in immortal dreams of plenty, peace and sunshine.

I shall repeat the experiment of nudging my amiable djinn into agreeable activity. I have a great many schemes to put before him, and if my friends discover that I am talking with enthusiasm about Pizarro they will know that I am putting in a plea with the director of dreams for a trip to Peru, and that if I am unusually concerned, even distressed, about the fate of Mummery, or the importance of conquering Mount Everest, I have in mind the possibility of a climbing excursion in the Himalayas. It is an excellent way of filling up the blanks in one's experience.

As we get on in years we become conscious of those blanks. We feel that we are in danger of missing much of the show we came to see. While we are young, say, up to fifty, we are not troubled. There seems plenty of time still to do everything worth doing, and see everything worth seeing. But after fifty the horizon shrinks most alarmingly, or perhaps it would be truer to say that it expands most alarmingly, and we find that, not only is Heaven, as Hood said, farther off

than it seems in childhood, but that the desirable places of the earth have become more inaccessible. When I was a boy and had my imagination stirred by tales of the backwoods and Russell's songs about

The land of the free  
Where the mighty Missouri rolls down to the sea,

I had no doubt that I should one day roll down with it, probably in a canoe, with a friendly Indian. Everything seemed possible then. Life was so enormously long an affair that the only disturbing thought was how you would be able to fill it up, and you had no more idea of missing a trip up the Amazon or seeing the Rockies and Niagara and the Grand Cañon when you grew up than of not being privileged to smoke a pipe or to have a latchkey or to go to Lord's or the Oval and see Grace whenever you felt inclined.

In this comfortable conviction that we shall do everything in good time we jog along doing nothing in particular, getting more and more like the donkey we used to see at Carisbrooke Castle years ago, tramping round and round its tread-mill without ever reaching anywhere. We are not disquieted. We feel that any day in the infinite days before us we shall be threading the Thousand Islands or climbing the Heights of Abraham, or seeing the sunrise in the Oberland or the sunset in Venice, or the dawn coming up like thunder on the road to Mandalay, or standing in the Coliseum at Rome or among the ruins of Carthage or Timgad, or sailing among the isles of Greece or catching the spicy breezes that, according

to the hymn of the good Bishop Heber, whom we could not suspect of romancing, come from Ceylon's favoured isle.

And so with other things. One day, assuredly, we shall take to horse-riding, and canter gaily round Rotten Row, or we shall go yachting in the Mediterranean or shooting in Scotland. And think of the books we shall read in the enormous leisure that lies before us. There is that fellow Karl Marx, for example. He certainly must be read—some day. It is absurd not to know what he said, when all the world goes on babbling so learnedly about him. No doubt he is a dull fellow, but we cannot, of course, leave the world without knowing why he created such a hubbub. And there are a lot of other high-brows that we shall become acquainted with in good time. We shall really study those categorical imperatives of the illustrious Kant, and the monism of Spinoza, and the *Leviathan* and the *Novum Organum*, and a score of other solemn books that ought to be read and must be read—some day. We are not worried about these things. We have years and years before us, and shall need some stout fellows like these to make the time pass by.

That is how we drift until, somewhere in the fifties, we begin to suspect that we are cutting it rather fine, and that all those riches of experience that we confidently expected to enjoy and those intellectual conquests that we intended to make are slipping beyond our grasp. Karl Marx is still joyfully unthumbed, the *Novum Organum* still beckons us

unavailingly from the abode where the eternal are, and we are still hazy about the categorical imperatives of the illustrious Kant. The call of the mighty Missouri falls faint on our ears, and Ceylon's spicy breezes we have to take at second-hand from the saintly Heber. We are chained to the No. 16 bus to Cricklewood or the tube to Shepherd's Bush, and when we break loose we find ourselves on the pier at Brighton or heroically scaling Beachy Head. We pass our dreams of adventure on to hopeful and undazzled youth, browsing greedily in the breathless pages of Prescott. We are not even sure that we want to go now, so habituated have we become to the familiar tread-mill. I daresay the Carisbrooke donkey would have been broken-hearted at the idea of a trip to Cowes. We are like Johnson when he was asked if he would not like to see Giant's Causeway. "Sir, I should like to see it, but I should not like *to go to see it.*"

It would be pleasant if we could educate our dreams to spirit us away without all the trouble of tickets and luggage and travel to the sights and experiences we have missed. Do not tell me it would be an idle illusion. There was no illusion in my island. I can see it in my mind as clearly as any place I ever visited in the flesh, and if I had the skill I could draw its hills and paint its tranquil sea and sunny sands for you. To-night I hope to spend with Mummery in the Alps.

## OCTOBER DAYS

JUST below me on the hillside is a forty-acre field that slopes gently down to the valley. Last year it was ploughed by a motor-tractor: this year I rejoice to say it is being ploughed in the old way, as it has been ploughed for a thousand years. I suppose we ought to be grateful for the motor-tractor and the steam-digger that in cheapening production cheapen our food, but I am glad that the farmer below me has returned to the ancient way. When the machine comes in, the poetry goes out, and though poetry has no place in the farmer's ledger it is pleasant to find that he has sound reasons for reverting to the primitive plough. All the operations of the fields are beautiful to see. They are beautiful in themselves and beautiful in their suggestions of the permanence of things in the midst of which we come and go like the guests of a day. Who can see the gleaners in the field, or the haymakers piling the hay on the haywain, or the mower bending over the scythe, without the stirring of feelings which the mere beauty of the scene or of the motion do not explain? Indeed the sense of beauty itself is probably only the emanation of the thoughts subtly awakened by the action. It is so with pictures. I do not know any painting that lives in my mind with a more abiding beauty than one of Millet's. It is just a solitary upland field, with a flight of birds and an untended plough lying in



the foreground. The barrenness and austerity of the scene are almost forbidding at the first glance, but as the mind dwells on it, it becomes instinct with meaning and emotion. Evening has come and darkness is falling over the land. The labourer has left the field and the rooks are going home. In the midst of the ancient solitude and silence that have taken possession of the earth, the old plough has the passion of personality. It embodies the epic of man's labour with the intensity that direct statement could not convey but only the power of suggestion can give.

And so it is with the scene before me. As I watch the ploughman drawing that straight, undulating line in the yellow stubble of the field, he seems to be not so much a mortal as a part of the landscape, that comes and goes as the seasons come and go, or as the sun comes and goes. His father, it may be, ploughed this field before him, and his father before him, and so on back through the centuries to the days when the monks still drank their sack and ate their venison in the monastery below, which is now only a mound of stones. And over the new-ploughed soil the rooks, who have as ancient an ancestry as himself, descend in clouds to forage as they have descended in these late October days for a thousand years. And after the rooks, the starlings. They have gathered in hosts after the pleasant domestic intimacies of summer for their winter campaigning, and stream across the sky in those miraculous mass-manceuvres that affect one like winged and noiseless music. When they swoop down on the upturned soil

the farmer blesses them. He forgets the devastations of the summer in the presence of the ruthless war which the mail-clad host is making on the leather-jackets and other pestilent broods that lurk in the soil. They, too, have their part in the eternal economy of the fields. They are notes in that rhythm of things which touches our transitoriness with the hint of immemorial ancestry.

The ploughman has reached the far end of his furrow and rests his horses while he takes his lunch by the hedgerow. That is aflame once more with the returning splendours of these October days. The green of summer has turned to a passion of gold and scarlet and yellow and purple, and all over the landscape the foliage is drunk with colour. The elms that have stood so long garbed in sober green are showing wonderful tufts and curls of bright yellow at the top, like old gentlemen who are growing old gaily. It is as though they have suddenly become vocal and hilarious and are breaking into song. A few days hence they will be a glory of bright yellow. But that last note of triumph does not belong to October. It is in the first days of November that the elm is at its crowning hour. But the beech is at its best now, and the woodlands that spread up the hill-side glow, underfoot and overhead, with the fires of fairyland.

In the bright warm sunshine there is a faint echo of the songs of spring. There are chirrups and chattering from voices that have been silent for long. There is the "spink, spink" of the chaffinch, and

from the meadowland at the back there comes at intervals the song of a lark, not the full song of summer, but no mean imitation of it. It is the robin, however, who is now chorister-in-chief. His voice was lost or unnoticed when the great soloists were abroad, but now he is left to sing the requiem of the year alone—unless we include the owl who comes punctually every evening as the dusk falls to my garden, and utters a few owlish incantations.

I can see the ploughman nearing the top end of the field, and can hear the jangle of the harness and his comments to the horses and almost the soft fall of the soil as the furrow is turned over. I think I will bid him adieu, for these October days provide tasks for me as well as for the ploughman. There are still some apples to pick, there is an amazing bed of carrots to be got up, there are laurels to be cut down, there are—oh, joy!—bonfires to be lighted, and there are young fir-trees to be transplanted. I think I will start with the bonfires.

### NAMING THE BABY

I TAKE no responsibility in the matter. It is true that I was consulted, but only in a sort of Elder Statesman capacity. I happened to be the grandfather in the case, and my opinion was asked, not as having

any artistic merit, but as a tribute to my ancestral status. Moreover, I was to be the godfather, and could not be decently left out of the discussion.

At this stage the current was running strong in favour of "Martin."

"Why Martin?" I asked. "There has never been a Martin in the family, and the only Martins I can recall are Martin Luther and Martin Tupper. But why commemorate them?"

"We aren't proposing to commemorate them. We are not thinking of them. We are thinking of Martin on its merits. There's a nice clean, sharp quality about it. It's not too unusual, and just unusual enough—plain and not too plain. It has distinction without frills. That's the case for Martin."

"But if you want a name with that sort of flavour," said I, "why not Crispin?"

"Crispin, by Jove. That's an idea. Why, Sylvia, why didn't you think of Crispin? Of course, it's Crispin. It fits him like a glove. Here, pass Crispin over to me. What clarity! What austerity! What a flavour of the antique world! Henry the Fifth before Agincourt, and all the rest of it. It's like a beautiful frosty morning—sunshine and a nip in the air, a clean wind and a clear sky."

But when at the next conference the subject was resumed, Crispin had passed under a cloud. It was a little too chill—a little too much of autumn about it. And it called attention to itself. Now Philip—that had the smack of high summer. It was round and full and came trippingly from the tongue. And as

for its traditions, these were abundant, Philip of Macedon and Philip Sidney.

"And Philip the Second," I said.

"Well, we must take the good with the bad. And after all the name's the thing."

"Have you thought of Christopher?"

"Yes, for one whole evening Christopher went like a gale of wind. I forget why we dropped it. Why did we drop it, Sylvia? There must have been some reason, but I can't for the life of me think what it was or what it could be. Christopher. . . . Yes, I think we shall have to reconsider Christopher, Sylvia."

That evening there was a ring on the telephone. "It's all right," said the voice. "We've had a brain-wave. We've decided on Antony—A-n-t-o-n-y—no 'h,' of course."

"You mean the sinner, not the saint. I don't like Mark Antony. Can't forgive him that affair of Cicero's head."

"Well, they all used to do things like that in those days."

"But why allude to the fellow?"

"We are not alluding to him."

"You can't help alluding to him. It's the greatest one-man name in the world. Why not go for simplicity. There's John. Glorious name, John—fits anybody—splendid traditions, John Milton, John Dryden, John Bright, John Bunyan, John Donne——"

"Then you don't like Antony."

"I don't say that. I said I didn't like Mark Antony."

When the jury met again, however, Antony, like

Philip and Christopher, was out of the running, and Martin had reappeared. There was such a quietude about Martin, you know. It was calm, it was self-controlled, it was full of peace, and yet it wasn't dull. There couldn't possibly be anything wrong with a fellow named Martin.

'Well,' said I, 'Martin. I never picked up a tolerable dust in the world, and Martin Lupin was as dull as an oyster.' Now Stephen.

'Yes, Stephen is a fine name. We've thought a lot about Stephen. It has just the right note of romance without being romantic. I think we turned it down because we thought it was rather defeatist in spirit. There was Stephen who was stoned, wasn't he?—and King Stephen who lost his crown—didn't he?—and Uncle Stephen who was drowned, and things like that. We don't want to start the boy with a 'defeatist' name. But Stephen is beautiful. I think we shall have to think about Stephen again, Sylvia.'

And they did. We've settled on Stephen, was the eleventh hour bulletin from headquarters.

I was a little late when I reached the church, and the christening group was already around the font with the clergyman in attendance. The service proceeded at once, and reached the point at which the clergyman demanded the name of 'this child.'

Michael, came the astonishing reply.

I looked up and caught a mischievous glint in the maternal eye. 'Well, you see,' she said afterwards, 'we were quite exhausted with the search, and fell on Michael in desperation. And he *was* born on

St. Michael's Day. And there was Michael Angelo, you know. Anyhow, it's done now, and can't be undone. But I do hope Michael——"

"Mike," I said.

"No, no, it's to be Michael—I do hope Michael will like it."

"How's Michael?" I asked a few days later when the father visited me.

"The baby is going on splendidly," he said.

"The baby," I said. "Why not Michael?"

"Oh, something's got to be done. We can never leave the poor child with that name tied to him. We think of calling him Martin."

"Or Stephen," I said.

## FAREWELL TO HAMPSTEAD

IN the house there are portents of impending change. A feeling of clearance is in the air. There is a going-away aspect about the furniture, pictures are down and in odd passages and corners there are bundles and boxes of books piled up for removal. Most conclusive of all, there is beside the gate a board bearing in large red letters the word "Sold." It is the announcement to the world that I am on the march to fresh woods and pastures new. They are beautiful

woods and desirable pastures. I have no doubt I shall be as happy amidst them as a very variable temper permits me to be in this very variable world of ours.

And yet I confess that the sight of that word "Sold" over the gate gives me an orphaned feeling. It translates itself in my mind into "Finis"—the end of a chapter, the completion of another long stage in a journey that seems now unconscionably short, the cold epitaph of irrevocable things. Taking farewell of a house that has become as familiar to you as your own shadow is like taking leave of something of your spiritual self. It is no longer a thing of bricks and mortar. It is compact of dreams and babbles of a thousand forgotten things that were and will not be again. That is so of any house where you have lived long and seen happy days; but when that house is at Hampstead, a bow-shot from the Heath, the twinge of parting is peculiarly sharp.

I daresay there are as pleasant places under the sun as Hampstead. I do not know them, but I am willing to believe that there are. Pleasanter places, I think, there cannot be. It was Happy Hampstead in the far-off days when the Abbot and monks of Westminster used to come hawking and hunting up its breezy heights and down into the Forest of Middlesex beyond; it was Happy Hampstead when the gallants and fine ladies of two hundred years ago came to Well Walk to drink the waters and dance and philander in the greenwood, and it is Happy Hampstead still, the hill of vision and the inexhaustible playground of the city that spreads,



vast and mysterious, at its foot. Here on this sandy spit, with its ponds and its hollows, its birch woods and its hawthorn bushes, its wide vistas and secret places, its sense of the sea-shore and its feeling of the mountains, is the land where it is always afternoon. Romance clings to it like an odour and mirth is in its very atmosphere. It is the idyll of London.

And what a wealth of memories swarm around its hillsides, peopling its quaint courts and ways, and the very gorse bushes with the shadows of the past. There is hardly a foot of its soil that is without its story – Dick Turpin riding on moonlit nights over the swarthy heath, Dick Steele taking refuge from his creditors in the lonely cottage on Haverstock Hill, where Sir Charles Sedley had lived before him, the famous Kit-Cat Club with Addison and all the wits of the day holding its summer sessions hard by the Whitestone Pond: Charles Lamb hunting among the gorse bushes for the snuff-box that he had thrown away the day before in a mood of renunciation after a visit with Hone to the “Bull and Bush”; Shelley carrying a poor woman whom he had found lying in the snow to Leigh Hunt’s house in the Vale of Health; Sir Harry Vane coming out of his house on Rosslyn Hill on his last journey to the Tower; Constable’s pines by the Spaniards’ Road, and the gibbet tree on which the highwaymen were hanged in chains, that still lies where it fell above the road at North End; Wordsworth walking up the hill to visit Joanna Baillie; and Pope hobnobbing with Arbuthnot; Johnson, in the days of his poverty,

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tramping up from Fleet Street to see his ailing wife at Frogna; the tales of the Spaniards' Inn, where Mrs. Bardell had her party, and where the rioters assembled for their attack on Mansfield at Ken Wood; the great Pitt, in his madness at Pitt House; Romney nursing his gloomy spirit at Holly Hill; Keats attending his dying brother in Well Walk and writing his immortal odes in Wentworth Place; Crabbe——

But no, the shadows crowd too thick and fast to be recorded. I walk amongst them with the feeling that I, too, seem about to become a shadow, and as I leave the Heath where the children are playing hide-and-seek among the hawthorn trees and the dogs are splashing in the Leg of Mutton Pond and turn into a road where the one brazen word "Sold" seems to fill the landscape, I have a vague sense of attending a funeral. Fortunately it is my own funeral—the funeral of twenty happy years on this sunny eminence—and not the funeral of Happy Hampstead. Men may come and men may go, but neither time nor change can touch the spirit of this enchanted hill.

Jane says that she will never have the heart to return to it. I feel a bit like that myself. I feel that I shall not want to disturb the dream into which those Hampstead days are fading. It will be enough to remember that I too once dwelt in Arcady.

## IN A LUMBER-ROOM

I WENT into the lumber-room glowing with an emotion of apostolic fervour. I would clear out this rubbish of the past. It was a shame that it should cumber the ground when space was so exiguous and rents so expensive. Why, this room, said I to myself (looking sternly meanwhile at the chaos within), would take a bed. At a squeeze it would take two beds. Let in the light and the air, and it would be a bedroom fit for the most delicate sleeper, remote alike from the noise without and the disturbing sounds within. I was not sure I would not claim it for myself. Carlyle would have revelled in a room so impenetrable to the cock's shrill clarion and the clatter of the early morning milk-cans.

By this time my eye had grown accustomed to the dim light within, and the rubbish began to take definition. I stooped down and picked up—a boot. Not an ordinary boot, but a boot of monumental pattern, weighing between two and three pounds, with leather like the hide of a rhinoceros and with huge nails cunningly shaped to grip the rocks. Here and there a nail was missing. I knew where each had gone. The one missing from the right sole was knocked out on the Pillar Rock one winter's day. That one from the heel was left on the Finsteraarjoch, and with that reminder all the splendours of the Oberland, the gloom of the Rhone Valley below, the Dom

and the Matterhorn catching the last rays of the sun beyond, came back with a sudden and vivid glory, like the landscape of a dream. Rubbish! This rubbish? . . . I found the fellow of the boot and put them aside. They must be oiled again and stuffed afresh with oats to keep them in shape. I might yet kick a nail or two out of them before the curtain of the rocks and the glaciers was rung down upon my journeyings.

Undismayed by this check I turned to the lumber again. From the confusion a handle protruded. I seized it and drew out an old and battered cricket-bat. I had not seen it for years, and had long forgotten its existence, but at the touch and sight of it old scenes submerged me like a tide. It was pregnant with secret records that I alone could read. That fracture at the bottom was done—let me see—yes, at far-away Lancaster more than thirty years ago, when I was a casual member of a wandering team playing the asylum staff. And at the hint my mind went a-travelling to the pleasant pastures of the Fylde, with the Lune dreamily flowing by the castled town, and the fine sweep of Morecambe Bay visible to the mind's eye beyond, with the evening light spreading over the tranquil landscape and flushing the distant peaks of Lakeland. . . . And that crack down the middle commemorated Whackerley's terrific feat when, last man in against a village team, he went and smote the bowling like a fury and converted an ignominious defeat . . . But let me tell the story of that heroic day. . . .

Fifteen for nine wickets! The scorer, a heavy youth with a straw in his mouth and his shirt sleeves rolled up to the shoulders, announced the fact to me with undisguised enjoyment. He was sitting on a tussock of grass that served for pavilion, commanding a good view of the wicket that was set in the midst of the undulation of the common. Around him were strewn the hats and coats of the players, a few derelict pad and mallet in his hand.

Looks like a wash out, said the scorer as the last man in a purple cap departed from the vicinity of the tussock, smacking his leg with the bat, whether with nervousness or assurance no one could say, for no one had ever seen him hit.

Well, you never can tell, said the publican. Cricket's a rum game, and what I says is this: You never know when a dark horse'll turn up." He had brought up the refreshments at my request, and he was not the man to desert me in a tight place.

It was a tight place. I had challenged the village team, and had got together a scratch lot from anywhere—a boy home from school, elderly persons who 'used to play but haven't touched a bat for years, you know—a man who had once played for his "house" at Harrow, another whose brother had been twelfth man for his college, and so on—a team of great expectations, a team that might astonish the countryside or vanish in laughter.

It looked like vanishing in laughter. We had begun very hopefully. The village team had straggled up

from the valley straight from the harvest fields that stretched below over the countryside. A few, including Alec, an enterprising young farmer, with a round cherubic face, who captained the team, were in flannels, the rest in their harvesting clothes. Alec won the toss and declared that he would take first smack. It was a wicket of fine, outwardly smooth and amiable, but charged with volcanic possibilities that made the ball work miracles, plunging, shooting, bumping, breaking like an untamed colt or an infuriated bull. We missed a catch or two in the first over, but two wickets fell in the second and when Tom Wilkins, the local Jessop, was run out and six wickets were down for twenty we seemed to have the villagers at our mercy.

We found unsuspected support from an aged umpire—a responsible-looking person with a bowed back and a massive grey beard—sexton, bell ringer, and parson's factotum—who followed one simple rule. Whenever he was appealed to he held up his hand gravely and benignantly like a bishop administering a blessing. With his help we got rid of two or three truculent fellows who looked like scoring and all the team were out for forty nine. They would have been out for less if I had not, in a weak moment, put Jim Whelks on to bowl. Jim is the local higgler and had assured me that he had captured a team 'down in the sheers,' and that his bowling—underhand—was such a whirlwind affair that the local men stood in terror of him. 'Don't suppose they'll let me bowl, sir,' he said, confidentially, the night before. But

they did. I wished they hadn't, for his whirlwind piled up twelve byes for them.

It seemed a small thing to score fifty runs. The publican was sure we should do it. "It's a team of dark horses," he said to me cheerfully, "and it stands to reason there's one flier amongst 'em." To Alec I fancy he had another tale, for the publican is above party, with a foot planted securely in each camp. But the dark horse did not appear. Our misfortunes began in the first over, and continued with remarkable regularity during the succeeding overs. If anyone looked like making a stand the venerable umpire, pursuing his sovereign rule with inflexible impartiality, held up his hand. Fifteen for nine, and as the last man went in smacking his leg with his bat, we wondered how we were to steal from the stricken field unobserved by the village folk, who were sitting in the shade under the hedge.

But what was this? Purple Cap, who had gone in last because he was so confident that he "wasn't worth a run," had cracked the first ball to the ditch for four and snicked the next for one. Twenty! Well, well, this was not disgraceful. He had the bowling again. The first ball went over the hedge—six; the second bounded down the hill towards the valley—four; thirty. "Well, he is a one-er," said the scorer, changing his straw to the other side of his mouth. Panic seized the bowlers; the fielders went farther and farther out into the landscape. But Purple Cap was insatiable. He seemed not a man but a hurricane. He leapt at everything with a devouring fury and

the ball flew here, there, and everywhere. Once the stumper appealed, but he had the wrong umpire for judge. My bat was smashed, but I didn't care. "Send him more bats," I shouted. The score rose like magic. "A regular pelthoria of runs," said the publican. Forty—fifty (the match was won)—sixty—seventy—eighty—eighty-five—then a well-directed throw-in from the long-field knocked the wicket down. "How's that?" Up went the venerable umpire's arm like a semaphore at the familiar sound. And Purple Cap came back to the tussock in triumph.

"It was just as I said," remarked the publican when I saw him standing before the inn later in the evening. "'Mark my words,' I said, 'there's a dark horse in that lot somewhere,' and a dark horse there was. I ain't seen anything like it since my soldiering days in India. Killed a python we did—dead as a door-nail down to the last two-foot of his tail. I put my arm on his tail and he closed round it that tight you couldn't pull him away until his tail was dead too. I ain't seen such a lively tail since until I set eyes on that chap in the purple cap this evening. He's stirred this place up and no mistake. They won't forget him in a hurry."

Of course, the bat must remain. It was not a bat, but a living memorial, a thing that talked to me a joyous private language and seemed to secrete by some magic the very essence of myself. To destroy it would be a sort of suicide. As well might Nelson



have broken up the timbers of the old *Victory* to heat the kitchen fire. I rubbed the dust from its battered face and put it honourably in the corner.

I began to feel as though I had been caught desecrating a cemetery. The vision of that additional bedroom, with windows, fresh air and electric light, was fading. I bent a little doubtfully, and seized a large tome. It was an old album, one of those huge and ugly volumes that no household was without a generation ago, but no household visibly possesses to-day. And I began to turn over its leaves. . . . What is there more poignant than an old, forgotten album? Here are "the children" again, miraculously resurrected from the past, playing on the sands at Dawlish, swimming in the sea, standing against the sky-line of the cliffs at Sheringham with the sunshine upon their laughing faces and their hair streaming in the wind. How long I spent over that old album I do not know, for it stirred many thoughts that made me forgetful--thoughts that do not easily find words to clothe them. But I put the album aside for dusting. Really this lumber-room might be kept more tidily and reverently.

And what is this vast cover, sticking out, dog-eared, from the lumber? My old portfolio, given me forty-six years ago as a tribute from admiring parents, to my artistic achievements. How I gloried in its ample blue covers. Why, Landseer himself, the incomparable Landseer, must have such a portfolio as that. And I laboured with my pencil to fill it with things worthy of its dignity, and here they were.

to-day, old portraits of grandmothers and aunts and copies of Landseer's dogs and horses and Peter Paul in his big hat, and the serene Dürer, with his long flaxen curls, and, on each one, in large, bold, boyish writing, "Drawn by ——" and the date carefully put in lest posterity should not know that these miracles were done by one so young. *Ay de mi*, as old Carlyle used to say. *Ay de mi*. . . .

I have changed my mind about the lumber-room. We have plenty of bedrooms, and if we haven't we must go short. That lumber-room is the abode of finer things than bedsteads. It is a chamber of the spirits. But it must certainly be kept more tidy.

## ON A FINGER-POST

AT the end of the orchard, where the road that climbs up the hillside from the valley crosses the old British track that has ambled along the slopes of the hills for thousands of years, stands a finger-post. One of its hands has fallen with age, and the other two are hardly legible, though with difficulty you may see that one of them directs the wayfarer to Dunstable. I have never seen anyone consult it, and on a moonlight night it looks the most gaunt and solitary thing on earth, for ever pointing a minatory finger over the glimmering landscape, like a prophet vainly directing a naughty and unheeding

world to the land of Beulah. Nobody takes any notice of it.

But it has its moments of consequence. On high-days and holidays in the summer, days such as these, happy picnickers from afar, mostly school-children out for their annual treat, come to a halt at the old finger-post on their way to the summit of the hill. The horses are unhitched from the waggonette and are left to graze while the children spread their lunch or their tea on the Icknield Way, which here resumes the character of a green-ride over which the centuries have passed without record of change. But no one ever seems to want to go to Dunstable. I do not want to go to Dunstable myself. In time I suppose the poor old finger-post will tire of telling the world to go to Dunstable, and will drop its second arm in weariness and despair.

I have no desire to go to Dunstable, because I like the name so much that I do not want to spoil the emotion of pleasure it gives me by any earthly contacts. I should as soon think of going to Dunstable as of going to Ashby-de-la-Zouch. I would not destroy the poetry that hangs about that name for anything the place could give me. Ashby-de-la-Zouch belongs to the realm of dreams, where high romance is always afoot and you may see any day some splendid knight in the tournament charging down upon his foe, while the beautiful heroine drops her handkerchief to show that she can bear no more. Why should I desecrate this agreeable fancy by discovering that Ashby-de-la-Zouch is (perhaps) a grubby

little place with one frowsy tea-shop and a tin tabernacle. I do not say that that is what Ashby-de-la-Zouch is like. It may be a very nice place with a boulevard and a bandstand. I shall never know. But it could not possibly be like my Ashby-de-la-Zouch. Nothing could be like my Ashby-de-la-Zouch.

It is so with Bideford in Devon. It may be that if one went to Bideford in Devon one would find it very much like Southend-on-Sea, or Skegness or Blackpool or any other popular resort. It may have a pier and half a dozen cinemas and a "Ham and Eggs" Parade like New Brighton. It may be a wilderness of stuffy lodging-houses, with

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in every window, and touts who salute you at every step. But to the imagination Bideford in Devon is something quite different from that. It is the gateway of adventure, the arch wherethrough gleams the untravelled world. On the shore you may meet Grenville or Drake in buff jerkin and silken hose, and Salvation Yeo telling tales to a crowd of open-mouthed youths and blowing clouds of tobacco before their astonished eyes. And in the harbour you may see the little *Revenge* herself, waiting for her crew of "men from Bideford in Devon" who are to share in the immortal exploit that hangs like an imperishable halo over this Devon shore.

I once knew a man who came from Bideford. I don't suppose he was really better than if he had come from Chowbent, or Wigan, or Coggeshall. I

fancy he was quite an ordinary man; but to me he came trailing clouds of glory from afar. He seemed to waft breezes from the Spanish Main before him, and in his pockets I fancied I heard the chink of doubloons that had come from a treasure-ship in Nombre Dios Bay. I could not regard him as a man. I regarded him as a romance. What else could one do with a man who came from Bideford in Devon? I was very young then, but I doubt whether years have wrought any difference. I doubt whether I could do business with any success with a man who had come from Bideford. I should be as wax in his hands or as clay to the potter. But much as I love the sound of its name, no finger-post will ever tempt me to Bideford in Devon. I will preserve the vision. I will not break the spell.

Now, it is different with places like those Essex villages, Messing and Mucking. Anyone might go to Messing or to Mucking and have quite a pleasant surprise. I have not been to them myself, but I should not be afraid to go to them. If Messing (or Mucking) should turn out to be no better than its name I should rejoice in its blunt honesty, and if on the contrary it should prove a country idyll, all ivy and parish pumps and village greens and thatched cottages, with perhaps the ancient pound in one field and the old village stocks in another, a ghost haunting the Tudor manor-house and an owl keeping its nightly vigil in the church tower—if, I say, Messing (or Mucking) should be like this, one would have the sensation which Mr. Birrell had when he picked up a first

edition of Gray's *Blegy* on a threepenny barrow. Yes, decidedly, if that finger-post pointed to Messing or Mucking I would go there. But not to Dunstable.

Places with beautiful or suggestive names are like the heroes of our fancy: they ought not to be seen. Who ever saw a man who had become a myth to him without disappointment? I remember when I was a boy and saw W. G. Grace for the first time what a sense of disillusion I suffered. He had become a fable to me. I used to see him in imagination descending from Olympus, with all nature celebrating his advent. The clouds would clap their hands at his approach and the earth would assuredly tremble with joy. And instead he just walked about and talked like any other man, and got out on the same plane of frail mortality. It was my first lesson in the brutal realism of things.

It was such a shock that Stevenson records in *Across the Plains*. Who is there who has not felt the beauty of that word "Wyoming"? It is a name that would almost make one forget the toothache. It is the very stuff of poetry, a balm for the troubled spirit, an anodyne for the jangled nerves. I could imagine a doctor prescribing that a patient should repeat "Wyoming" half a dozen times every hour as a cure for neurasthenia or something like that. That was how Stevenson felt about it until he had the misfortune to see it.

To cross such a plain [Nebraska] is to grow homesick for the mountains. I longed for the Black Hills of Wyoming, which I knew we were soon to enter, like

an ice-bound whaler for the spring. Alas! and it was a worse country than the other. All Sunday and Monday we travelled through these sad mountains or over the main ridge of the Rockies, which is a fair match to them in misery of aspect. Hour after hour it was the same unhomely and unkindly world about our onward path. . . .

But get down the book and read the whole passage. It is as beautiful a piece of descriptive prose as you will find anywhere. But when you have read it you will be glad that you have not been to Wyoming and that you can still soothe the toothache with the sound of its magic name.

I shared the disenchantment which Stevenson felt in Wyoming when not long ago I travelled by the Ohio. I had been a captive since childhood to those bewitching vowels. However dull the world seemed, it could be brightened by the thought of the Ohio. I saw that shining river flowing through the landscape of fancy to the Southern seas, to the accompaniment of negro melodies and the song of the mocking-bird. Its waters were crystal like the river of Bunyan's vision, and as they went they sang of the old legends of the Kentucky Shore and Tennessee. Now the vision is shattered. I know that the Ohio (in winter at all events) is as yellow as pea-soup and as thick, flowing by rank, dishevelled shores, slopping over its banks and leaving great messy pools along its borders. I travelled by it and across it for the best part of a day, and I left it behind as gratefully as Stevenson left behind the Black Hills of Wyoming. It was a warning

to me to leave the cloud palaces of the mind unvisited. If I ever see a finger-post pointing to Wyoming, I shall ignore it as I ignore the hand that, from the corner of the orchard, points me to Dunstable

## A LOG FIRE

I CAME in from the woods with a settled purpose. I would spend the evening in exalting the beauty of these wonderful November days in the country. The idea presented itself to me not merely as a pleasure but as a duty. Long enough had November been misjudged and slandered, usually by Cockney poets like Tom Hood, who looked at it through the fogs of a million coal fires. Bare justice demanded that the truth should out, that the world should be told of this beautiful though aged spinster of the months who clothed the landscape in such a radiant garment of sunshine, carpeted the beech-woods with such a glow of gold and russet, filled the hedgerows with the scarlet of the hips and haws, the wine-red of the blackthorn, and the yellow of the guelder rose, and awoke the thrushes from their late summer silence.

This fervour for my Lady November is no new passion. There are certain things about which I have never made up my mind, and about which, I suppose, I never shall make up my mind. That is to say I make it up, and then unmake it, after which I remake it,



like the child on the sea-shore who sees his sand castle swept away by one tide, and returns to build it for another tide to sweep away. Thus, if I say that I prefer Bach's Concerto for Two Violins to any piece of music I have ever heard, I do not guarantee that a year hence I may not be found swearing by the Londonderry air, or a Hebridean song (the *Island Shieling Song*, for example), or the *Magic Flute*, or something from Schumann. A year later I may be round to the intertwined loveliness of the two violins again. And if I affirm that *The Brothers Karamazov* is the greatest achievement of the imagination since Shakespeare, I do not promise not to say the same thing of something else, *David Copperfield* or *Les Misérables*, when, after a due interval, I express my view again. And so with pictures and authors and towns and trees and flowers—in short, all the things that appeal to the changing emotions or to that vague and unstable thing called taste.

So it is in regard to the merits of the months. I have been trying all my life to come to a final decision on this great question. It seems absurd that one should spend, as I have spent, fifty or sixty years doing little else but sample the months without arriving at a fixed and irrevocable conclusion as to which I like best. But that is the case. I am a mere Don Juan with the months. I go flirting about from one to the other, swearing that each is more beautiful than her rivals. When I am with June it seems absurd that there should be anything else than June, and when I am with August I would not

sacrifice August with its waving cornfields and its sound of the reaper for half the calendar. But then comes September, and I chant Swinburne to her as though I had never loved another:

September! all glorious with gold as a king  
In the raiment of triumph attired,  
Outlightening the summer, outsweetening the spring,  
It broods o'er the woodlands with limitless wing,  
A presence of all men desired.

I do not doubt that I have declared that October, ruddy October, chill October, is the pick of the bunch, and I know that on the first bright day in February, when I see the snowdrops peeping out and hear the rooks in the elms, I shall be found declaring that this is the choicest moment of the year. And April-- April with the trees bursting into green and the meadows "smo'ered wi' new grass," as they say in the dales, and the birds coming up from the south bringing tidings of the summer-- well, what can one say of April, Shakespeare's April, Shakespeare's "sweet o' the year," except that there is none like her?

But I know that when May comes in and the orchards burst into foam, and the lilac, laburnum and pink hawthorn make every suburban street lyrical with colour and the beech-woods are clothed in that first tender green that seems to make the sunlight sing as it streams through and dapples the golden carpet of last year's leaves with light and shade, and the bees are humming like an orchestra

in the cherry and damson trees, and the birds are singing as though they are divinely drunk, and the first brood of young swallows are making their trial flights from the nest in the barn, and

When nothing that asks for bliss  
Asking aright is denied,  
And half of the world a bridegroom is  
And half the world a bride.

—then I know that I shall desert even My Lady April and give the palm to the undespoiled splendour of May, singing meanwhile with Francis Thompson :

By Goddés fay, by Goddés fay,  
It is the month, the merry month,  
It is the merry month of May.

In this shameless wandering of the affections I have come round once more to November, and I marvel, as I have marvelled many a year before, that the poets have left unsung the elderly beauties of this month, the quietude of its tones, the sombre dignity of its landscape, the sense of a noble passing, the fading colours, the falling leaves, the winds changing to a note of requiem among the dismantled branches—

Bare ruined choirs where late the sweet birds sang.

And lamenting this neglect I resolved to pay my tribute. But first I must make up the fire, for though my Lady November is beautiful she is austere. She has frozen the pump, and the grass is thick with hoar-frost, and to be just to her one must be warm.

So I piled on the logs and prepared to be warm and enthusiastic.

Then I did a foolish thing. I sat down in an arm-chair and surrendered myself to the fire's comfortable companionship. There is nothing more friendly or talkative than a fire. Even a coal fire, if you look at it steadfastly, will become as communicative as a maiden aunt. It knows all the gossip of the family, especially the gossip about old forgotten things. It will talk to you of events so remote that they seem to belong to the country of dreams. It will bring out faded portraits, and sing old songs, and burst into laughter that you have not heard perhaps for forty years, and revive antique jokes, and hand round steaming elderberry wine of Christmas nights, and make shadowgraphs on the wall as if you were a little boy again, and send you sliding and skating under the glittering stars. It forgets nothing about you, and it tells its memories so cheerfully and serenely that it leaves nothing for tears. All this even a coal fire will do when it is really in the vein and you have time to sit and listen.

But a wood fire has a magic beyond this. Its very smell is an intoxication as rapturous as romance, compounded of all you have read of the backwoods, of memories of the charcoal burners, and of Coal Munk Peter of tales of the woodlands. Tristan and Isolt, and Robin Hood, and Good King Wenceslaus, and the children of the New Forest, of Giles Winterbourne and Marty South, and all the delightful people with whom the mind loves to go a-gypsying far away.

“from this foolish world. Of course, you have to be something of a sentimentalist or a romantic to feel all this—such a person as I once walked with for a month in the Black Forest, to whom the smell of the woodlands was as exciting as wine, and the sight of a charcoal-burners’ camp a sort of apocalyptic vision. How well I remember those summer nights when, leaving the forest inn, we would plunge into the woodlands, he singing that haunting air *Der Mai ist gekommen* and interrupting it with a shout as he saw the glimmer of the charcoal-burner’s fire through the boles of the pine trees. . . .

But a wood fire is not only an idyll. It is an occupation. With a coal fire it is different. You put on a shovel of coals, and there’s an end of it. But a wood fire will furnish light and pleasing employment for a whole evening. And by a wood fire I do not mean those splinters of wood that you buy in towns, but thumping logs—beech or apple or fir, as the case may be—a yard or two long and with the bark intact that you lay across the fire-dogs and turn round and round until they are burned through at the centre and fall into the embers beneath in a glorious blaze, sending out such a generous warmth as only comes from a wood fire. Once or twice I drew myself away from this seductive task and sat down at the table, determined to write such a moving panegyric on November as would make it the haughtiest month of the year. Once I even went outside to get inspiration from the stars and the moon that was flooding the valley with a mystic light and the hoar-frost that

lay like a white garment over the orchard. I heard the hoot of the owl in the copse near by and the sound of the wind in the trees and the barking of a distant dog and came back to my task with a stern resolve to see it through. But the struggle was in vain. Always there was some nice readjustment of the logs necessary to call me to the charmed circle of the wood fire; always at the end I found myself planted in the arm-chair watching the changing scenery of the glowing embers.

So the article was not written after all. Perhaps it was as well, for I do not think I have the brush to do justice to My Lady November. It may be that that is why the wood fire had so easy a triumph.

## PILLAR ROCK

THOSE, we are told, who have heard the East a-calling "never heed naught else." Perhaps it is so; but they can never have heard the call of Lakeland at New Year. They can never have scrambled up the screes of the Great Gable on winter days to try a fall with the Arrow Head and the Needle, the Chimney and Kern Knotts Crack; never have seen the mighty Pillar Rock beckoning them from the top of Black Sail Pass, nor the inn lights far down in the valley calling them back from the mountains when night has fallen; never have sat round the inn fire and

talked of the jolly perils of the day, or played chess with the landlord—and been beaten—or gone to bed with the refrain of the climbers' chorus still challenging the roar of the wind outside—

Come, let us tie the rope, the rope, the rope,

Come, let us link it round, round, round.

And he that will not climb to-day,

Why—leave him on the ground, the ground, the ground.

If you have done these things you will not make much of the call of the temple bells and the palm trees and the spicy garlic smells—least of all at New Year. You will hear instead the call of the Pillar Rock and the chorus from the lonely inn. You will don your oldest clothes and wind the rope around you—singing meanwhile “the rope, the rope”—and take the night train, and at nine or so next morning you will step out at that gateway of the enchanted land—Keswick. Keswick! Wastdale! . . . Let us pause on the music of those words. . . . There are men to whom they open the magic casements at a breath.

And at Keswick you call on George Abraham. It would be absurd to go to Keswick without calling on George Abraham. You might as well go to Wastdale Head without calling on the Pillar Rock. And George tells you that of course he will be over at Wastdale on New Year's Eve and will climb the Pillar Rock or Scafell Pinnacle with you on New Year's Day.

The trap is at the door, you mount, you wave adieux, and are soon jolting down the road that runs

by Derwentwater, where every object is an old friend, whom absence only makes more dear. Here is the Bowder Stone and there across the Lake is Causey Pike, peeping over the brow of Cat Bells. (Ah! the summer days on Causey Pike, scrambling and picking wimberries and waking the echoes of Grisedale.) And there before us are the dark Jaws of Borrowdale and, beyond, the billowy summits of Great Gable and Scafell. And all around are the rocky sentinels of the valley. You know everyone and hail him by his name. Perhaps you jump down at Lodore and scramble up to the Falls. Then on to Rosthwaite and lunch.

And here the last rags of the lower world are shed. Fleet Street is a myth and London a frenzied dream. You are at the portals of the sanctuary and the great peace of the mountains is yours. You sling your rucksack on your back and your rope over your shoulder and set out on the three hours' tramp over Styhead Pass to Wastdale.

It is dark when you reach the inn yard, for the way down is long and these December days are short. And on the threshold you are welcomed by the landlord and landlady—heirs of Auld Will Ritson—and in the flagged entrance you see coils of rope and rucksacks and a noble array of climbers' boots—boots that make the heart sing to look upon, boots that have struck music out of many a rocky breast, boots whose missing nails each has a story of its own. You put your own among them, don your slippers, and plunge among your old companions of the rocks



with jolly greeting and pass-words. What a mingled gathering it is—a master from a school in the West, a jolly lawyer from Lancashire, a young clergyman, a barrister from the Temple, a manufacturer from Nottingham, and so on. But the disguises they wear to the world are cast aside, and the eternal boy that refuses to grow up is revealed in all of them.

Who shall tell of the days and nights that follow?—of the songs that are sung, and the “traverses” that are made round the billiard room and the barn, of the talk of handholds and footholds on this and that famous climb, of the letting in of the New Year, of the early breakfasts and the departures for the mountains, of the nights when, tired and rich with new memories, you all forgather again—save only, perhaps, the jolly lawyer and his fellows who have lost their way back from Scafell, and for whom you are about to send out a search party when they turn up out of the darkness with new material for fireside tales.

Let us take one picture from many. It is New Year's Day—clear and bright, patches of snow on the mountains and a touch of frost in the air. In the hall there is a mob of gay adventurers, tying up ropes, putting on putties, filling rucksacks with provisions, hunting for boots (the boots are all alike, but you recognise them by your missing nails). We separate at the threshold—this group for the Great Gable, that for Scafell, ours, which includes George Abraham, for the Pillar Rock. It is a two and a half hours' tramp thither by Black Sail Pass, and

as daylight is short there is no time to waste. We follow the watercourse up the valley, splash through marshes, faintly veneered with ice, cross the stream where the boulders give a decent foothold, and mount the steep ascent of Black Sail. From the top of the pass we look down lonely Ennerdale, where, springing from the flank of the Pillar mountain, is the great Rock we have come to challenge. It stands like a tower, gloomy, impregnable, sheer, 600 feet from its northern base to its summit, split on the south side by Jordan Gap that divides the High Man or main rock from Pigsaw, the lesser rock.

We have been overtaken by another party of three from the inn—one in a white jersey which, for reasons that will appear, I shall always remember. Together we follow the High Level Traverse, the track that leads round the flank of the mountain to the top of Walker's Gully, the grim descent to the valley, loved by the climber for the perils to which it invites him. Here we lunch and here we separate. We, unambitious (having three passengers in our party of five), are climbing the east face by the Notch and Slab route; the others are ascending by the New West route, one of the more difficult climbs. Our start is here; theirs is from the other side of Jordan Gap. It is not of our climb that I wish to speak, but of theirs. In the old literature of the Rock you will find the Notch and Slab route treated as a difficult feat; but to-day it is held in little esteem.

With five on the rope, however, our progress is slow, and it is two o'clock when we emerge from the

chimney, perspiring and triumphant, and stand, first of the year, on the summit of the Pillar Rock, where the wind blows thin and shrill and from whence you look out over half the peaks of Lakeland. We take a second lunch, inscribe our names in the book that lies under the cairn, and then look down the precipice on the west face for signs of our late companions. The sound of their voices comes up from below, but the drop is too sheer to catch a glimpse of their forms. "They're going to be late," says George Abraham—the discoverer of the New West—and then he indicates the closing stages of the climb and the slab where on another New Year's Day occurred the most thrilling escape from death in the records of the Pillar Rock—two men falling, and held on the rope and finally rescued by the third. Of those three, two, Lewis Meryon and the Rev. W. F. Wright, perished the next year on the Grand Paradis. We dismiss the unhappy memory and turn cheerfully to descend by Slingsby's Crack and the Old West route which ends on the slope of the mountain near to the starting-point of the New West route.

The day is fading fast, and the moon that is rising in the east sheds no light on this face of the great tower. The voices now are quite distinct, coming to us from the left. We can almost hear the directions and distinguish the speakers. "Can't understand why those lads are cutting it so fine," says George Abraham, and he hastens our pace down cracks and grooves and over ledges until we reach the screes and safety. And now we look up the great cliff

and in the gathering dusk one thing is visible—a figure in a white jersey, with arms extended at full stretch. There it hangs minute by minute as if nailed to the rocks.

The party, then, are only just making the traverse from the chimney to the right, the most difficult manœuvre of the climb—a manœuvre in which one, he in the white jersey, has to remain stationary while his fellows pass him. "This is bad," says George Abraham, and he prepares for a possible emergency. "Are you in difficulties? Shall we wait?" he cries. "Yes, wait." The words rebound from the cliff in the still air like stones. We wait and watch. We can see nothing but the white jersey, still moveless; but every motion of the other climbers and every word they speak echoes down the precipice, as if from a sounding-board. You hear the iron-shod feet of the climbers feeling about for footholds on the ringing wall of rock. Once there is a horrible clatter as if both feet are dangling over the abyss and scraping convulsively for a hold. I fancy one or two of us feel a little uncomfortable as we look at each other in silent comment. And all the time the figure in white, now growing dim, is impaled on the face of the darkness, and the voices come down to us in brief, staccato phrases. Above the rock, the moon is sailing into the clear winter sky and the stars are coming out.

At last the figure in white is seen to move and soon a cheery "All right" drops down from above. The difficult operation is over, the scattered rocks

are reached and nothing remains but the final slabs, which in the absence of ice offer no great difficulty. Their descent by the easy Jordan route will be quick. We turn to go with the comment that it is perhaps more sensational to watch a climb than to do one.

And then we plunge over the debris behind Pisgah, climb up the Great Doup, where the snow lies crisp and deep, until we reach the friendly fence that has guided many a wanderer in the darkness down to the top of Black Sail Pass. From thence the way is familiar, and two hours later we have rejoined the merry party round the board at the inn.

In a few days it is all over. This one is back in the Temple, that one to his office, a third to his pulpit, another to his mill, and all seem prosaic and ordinary. But they will carry with them a secret music. Say only the word "Wastdale" to them and you shall awake its echoes; then you shall see their faces light up with the emotion of incommunicable things. They are no longer men of the world; they are spirits of the mountains.

## WHY I DON'T KNOW

I WAS asked the other-day by one of those journals which love vast, resounding themes with which to astonish their readers to write an article on the most important man in the world. I declined, partly because I was busy and partly because I was lazy, but chiefly because I had not a ghost of a notion of the answer. Of course, it would have been possible for me to have discussed the claims of this man and that to pre-eminence, to have contrasted M. Poincaré with Mr. Lloyd George, Mr. Bernard Shaw with Mr. Charlie Chaplin, M. Trotsky with Signor Mussolini, Einstein with Rutherford, and so on; but I should not have answered the question. No one can answer the question. We can all guess; but one thing is pretty certain: we shall all guess wrong. The most important man in the world is somewhere, but he will not be known until he is dead, and we are all dead with him; not until our posterity looks back upon this time and says with one voice, "Behold, the man," as we to-day look back to the great age of Elizabeth and say, "Lo! Shakespeare." No one said it then, and no one thought it. Nearly two centuries had to pass before the true magnitude of this peak became visible, and even then it had to be discovered by observers from afar, by the critics of a foreign land and a foreign tongue.

Was there ever a period in history when the world knew where to look for its chief of men? If ever it

might have been expected to pick him out with the certainty of being right, it would have been when Augustus Cæsar reigned at Rome over the whole known world. He was so supreme that he seemed less a man than a god. But down in a little province of his vast empire there was a Boy growing up who was destined to change the whole face of the world and to outshine Augustus as the sun outshines a rush-light. The magnificence of Augustus and his empire is an empty memory of nineteen centuries ago, but Christianity is still the mightiest force in the affairs of men.

Or suppose you had been living in the year 1506, in Valladolid, and had asked yourself who was the most important man alive. You would have said the Pope or the Emperor or Ferdinand, without knowing that they were nothing compared with a poor old man who was dying in poverty and neglect in a mean street of that famous city. He did not know himself how vast a thing he had done and how his name would outlive and outsoar those of kings and warriors, poets and statesmen. He did not know that he had not simply found a new way to the East Indies, but had discovered a New World, and that all the vast continent of America would be the everlasting memorial of his life of struggle and disappointment. One would like to think that the spirit of Columbus, "poised in the unapparent," has the satisfaction of knowing what a resounding name he has left behind him.

Let us go on a few years. I will imagine that in 1530 I am asked, not by an editor—for that breed

had not then been invented—but by some other curious inquirer, to direct him to the king of men then living. I should probably have answered with some confidence. It was the day of the Great Kings. I suppose three men of such remarkable powers as Henry VIII., Charles V. and Francis I. never reigned in Europe simultaneously. It was only a question of which was the greatest to decide who was the most important man in the world. I daresay I should have decided for Henry; but of course I should have been wrong. The most important man in the world was a person of whom I should not then have heard—a wandering scientist born on the Vistula, Copernicus by name, into whose profound mind there had come the most stupendous conception that ever thrilled the thought of man. The earth was not, as had been supposed through all the ages, the fixed centre of the universe around which the stars moved in obedient subjection, but a little planet rushing with the rest round its great over-lord, the sun. With that terrific discovery, the whole conception of the cosmos was changed, the earth became a speck of dust in the unthinkable vast, religion assumed new meanings, and man fell from his proud pre-eminence as the lord of creation. In its effects it was the most momentous thing that ever happened in the secular history of man; but the point here is that if you and I had been living then and had had Copernicus pointed out to us in the street we should not have known that he was beyond all comparison the most tremendous figure in the world.



Take another illustration. The end of the eighteenth century was a time of great men. If we had guessed then who was the most important man alive we should have been puzzled to decide between Pitt and Burke, Johnson and Washington, Nelson and Napoleon, and a multitude of others. None of us would have thought of looking for him in the person of a certain gentle, unassuming instrument-maker who filled a modest position in Glasgow University. Yet if the most important man in the world is he who sets in motion the forces—whether of ideas or physical powers—that most profoundly affect the life of men, then no one living from, say, 1760 to 1800, was comparable with James Watt. He inaugurated the Age of Steam. He released the greatest power that the ingenuity of man has ever invented, and the train that thunders through the land, and the ship that ploughs the sea, and the engine that drives a thousand looms, are among the prolific children of his genius.

And so I repeat that I do not know who is the most important man in the world. He may be a solitary thinker wrestling with some vast conception that is destined to reshape all our thought. He may be some unknown scientist from whose laboratory there will emerge one day a power that will shake the heavens. He may be a prophet or a teacher who will help us to solve the riddle of this unintelligible world. He may be a discoverer or even a poet. I am sure he will not be a soldier, and I don't think he will be a politician. These people make a great noise in the world, but they rarely do anything that matters to posterity.

The most important man in the world is probably making no noise at all. His noise will come late like the sound of a great gun heard from afar. But it is a noise that will echo down the ages.

### IN DEFENCE OF IGNORANCE

A YOUNG man wrote to me the other day lamenting his ignorance and requesting me to tell him what books to read and what to do in order to become learned and wise. I sent him a civil answer and such advice as occurred to me. But I confess that the more I thought of the matter the less assured I felt of my competence for the task. I ceased to be flattered by the implied tribute to my omniscience, and felt rather like a person who gives up a third-class ticket after he has ridden in a first-class carriage might feel. I surveyed my title to this reputation for learning, and was shocked at the poverty of my estate. As I contrasted the mountain of things I didn't know with the molehill of things I did know, my self-esteem shrank to zero. Why, my dear young sir, thought I, I cannot pay twopence in the pound. I am nothing but the possessor of a widespread ignorance. Why should you come to me for a loan? I begin with myself—this body of me that is carried about on a pair of cunningly devised stilts and waves a couple of branches with five flexible twigs at the end of each, and is surmounted by a

large round knob with wonderful little orifices, and glittering jewels, and a sort of mat for a covering, and which utters strange noises and speaks and sings and laughs and cries. Bless me, said I, what do I know about it? I am a mere bundle of mysteries in coat and breeches. I couldn't tell you where my epiglottis is or what it does without looking in a dictionary. I have been told, but I always forget. I am little better than the boy in the class. "Where is the diaphragm?" asked the teacher. "Please, sir, in North Staffordshire," said the boy. I may laugh at the boy, but any young medical student would laugh just as much at me if I told him honestly what I do not know about the diaphragm. And when it comes to the ultimate mysteries of this aggregation of atoms which we call the human body the medical student and, indeed, the whole Medical Faculty, would be found to be nearly as ignorant as the boy was about the diaphragm.

From myself I pass to all the phenomena of life, and wherever I turn I find myself exploring what Carlyle calls the "great, deep sea of Nescience on which we float like exhalations that are and then are not." I see Orion striding across the southern heavens, and feel the wonder and the majesty of that stupendous spectacle, but if I ask myself what I know about it I have no answer. And even the knowledge of the most learned astronomer only touches the fringe of the immensity. What is beyond—beyond—beyond? His mind is balked, as mine is, almost at the threshold of the mighty paradox

of a universe which we can conceive neither as finite nor as infinite, which is unthinkable as having limits and unthinkable as having no limits. As the flowers come on in summer I always learn their names, but I know that I shall have to learn them again next year. And as to the mystery of their being, by what miracle they grow and transmute the secretions of the earth and air into life and beauty—why, my dear young sir, I am no more communicative than the needy knife-grinder. “Story? God bless you, I have none to tell, sir.”

I cannot put my hand to anything outside my little routine without finding myself meddling with things I don't understand. I was digging in the garden just now and came upon a patch of ground with roots deep down. Some villainous pest, said I, some enemy of my carrots and potatoes. Have at them! I felt like a knight charging to the rescue of innocence. I plunged the fork deeper and deeper and tore at the roots, and grew breathless and perspiring. Even now I ache with the agonies of that titanic combat. And the more I fought, the more infinite became the ramifications of those roots. And so I called for the expert advice of the young person who was giving some candy to her bees in the orchard. She came, took a glance into the depths, and said: “Yes, you are pulling up that tree.” And she pointed to an ivy-grown tree in the hedge a dozen yards away. Did I feel foolish, young sir? Of course I felt foolish, but not more foolish than I have felt on a thousand other occasions. And you ask me for advice.

I recall one among many of these occasions for my chastening. When I was young I was being driven one day through a woodland country by an old fellow who kept an inn and let out a pony and chaise for hire. As we went along I made some remark about a tree by the wayside, and he spoke of it as a poplar. "Not a poplar," said I with the easy assurance of youth, and I described to him for his information the characters of what I conceived to be the poplar. "Ah," he said, "you are thinking of the Lombardy poplar. That tree is the Egyptian poplar." And then he went on to tell me of a score of other poplars—their appearance, their habits and their origins—quite kindly and without any knowledge of the withering blight that had fallen upon my cocksure ignorance. I found that he had spent his life in tree culture and had been forester to a Scotch duke. And I had explained to him what a poplar was like! But I think he did me good, and I often recall him to mind when I feel disposed to give other people information that they possibly do not need.

And the books I haven't read, and the sciences I don't know, and the languages I don't speak, and the things I can't do—young man, if you knew all this you would be amazed. But it does not make me unhappy. On the contrary, I find myself growing cheerful in the contemplation of these vast undeveloped estates. I feel like a fellow who has inherited a continent and, so far, has only had time to cultivate a tiny corner of the inheritance. The rest I just wander through like a boy in wonderland.

Some day I will know about all these things. I will develop all these immensities. I will search out all these mysteries. In my heart I know I shall do nothing of the sort. I know that when the curtain rings down I shall be digging the same tiny plot. But it is pleasant to dream of future conquests that you won't make.

And, after all, aren't we all allotment-holders of the mind, cultivating our own little patch and surrounded by the wonderland of the unknown? Even the most learned of us is ignorant when his knowledge is measured by the infinite sum of things. And the riches of knowledge themselves are much more widely diffused than we are apt to think. There are few people who are not better informed about something than we are, who have not gathered their own peculiar sheaf of wisdom or knowledge in this vast harvest field of experience. That is at once a comfortable and a humbling thought. It checks a too soaring vanity on the one hand and a too tragic abasement on the other. The fund of knowledge is a collective sum. No one has all the items, nor a fraction of the items, and there are few of us so poor as not to have some. If I were to walk out into the street now, I fancy I should not meet a soul, man or woman, who could not fill in some blank of my mind. And I think—for I must not let humility go too far—I think I could fill some blank in theirs. Our carrying capacity varies infinitely, but we all carry something, and it differs from the store of anyone else on earth. And, moreover, the more knowledge of things

is not necessary to their enjoyment, nor necessary even to wisdom. There are things that every ploughboy knows to-day which were hidden from Plato and Cæsar and Dante, but the ploughboy is not wiser than they. Sir Thomas Browne, in his book on *Vulgar Errors*, declared that the idea that the earth went round the sun was too foolish to be controverted. I know better, but that doesn't make me a wiser man than Browne. Wisdom does not depend on these things. I suppose that, on the whole, Lincoln was the wisest and most fundamentally sane man who ever took a great part in the affairs of this planet. Yet compared with the average undergraduate he was utterly unlearned.

Do not, my young friend, suppose I am decrying your eagerness to know. Learn all you can, my boy, about this wonderful caravan on which we make our annual tour round the sun, and on which we quarrel and fight with such crazy ferocity as we go. But at the end of all your learning you will be astonished at how little you know, and will rejoice that the pleasure of living is in healthy feeling rather than in the accumulation of facts. There was a good deal of truth in that saying of Savonarola that "a little old woman who kept the faith knew more than Plato or Aristotle."

## ON A FINE DAY

It's just like summer! That has been the refrain all day. When I have forgotten to say it, Jane has said it, or the bee expert has shouted it from the orchard with the freshness of a sudden and delighted discovery. There are some people of penurious emotions and speech, like the Drumtochty farmer in Ian Maclaren's story, who would disapprove of this iteration. They would find it wasteful and frivolous. They do not understand that we go on saying it over and over again, like the birds, for the sheer joy of saying it. Listen to that bullfinch in the coppice. There he goes skipping from branch to branch and twig to twig, and after each skip he pauses to say, "It's just like summer," and from a neighbouring tree his mate twitters confirmation in perfect time. I've listened to them for half an hour and they've talked about nothing else.

In fact, all the birds are talking of nothing else, notably the great baritone who is at last in full song in his favourite chestnut below the paddock. For weeks he has been trying his scales a little doubtfully and tremulously, for he is a late starter, and likes the year to be well aired before he begins; but to-day he is going it like a fellow who knows his score so well that he could sing it in his sleep. And he, too, has only one theme: It's just like summer. He does not seem to say it to the world, but to himself,



for he is a self-centred, contemplative singer, and not a conscious artist like his great tenor rival, the thrush, who seems never to forget the listening world.

In the calm, still air, hillside, valley and plain babble of summer. There are far-off, boisterous shouts of holiday-makers rattling along the turnpike in waggons to some village festival (a belated football match, I fancy); the laughter of children in the beech-woods behind; the cheerful outdoor sounds of a world that has come out into the gardens and the fields. From one end of the hamlet there is the sound of hammering; from the other the sound of sawing. That excellent tenor voice that comes up from the allotments below belongs to young Dick. I have not heard it for four years or more; but it has been heard in many lands and by many rivers from the Somme to the Jordan. But Dick would rather be singing on the allotment with his young brother Sam (the leader of the trebles in the village choir) than anywhere else in the wide world. "Yes, I've been to Aleppo and Jerusalem, and all over the 'Oly Land," he says. "I don't care if I never see the 'Oly Land again. Anybody can have the 'Oly Land as far as I'm concerned. This is good enough for me—that is, if there's a place for a chap that wants to get married to live in."

Over the hedge a hearty voice addresses the old village dame who sits at her cottage door, knitting in the tranquil sunshine. "Well, this is all right, ain't it, mother?" "Yes," says the old lady, "it's just like summer." "And to think," continues the

voice, "that there was a thick layer o' snow a week back. And, mind you, I shouldn't wonder if there's more to come yet. To-morrow's the first day o' spring according to the calendar, and it stands to reason summer ain't really come yet, you know, though it do seem like it, don't it?" "Yes, it's just like summer," repeats the old lady tranquilly.

There in the clear distance is a streamer of smoke, white as wool in the sunlight. It is the banner of the train on its way to London. It is just like summer there, no doubt, but London is not gossiping about it as we are here. Weather in town is only an incident—a pleasurable incident or a nuisance. It decides whether you will take a stick or an umbrella, whether you will wear a straw hat or a bowler, a heavy coat or a mackintosh, whether you will fight for a place inside the bus or outside. It may turn the scale in favour of shopping or postpone your visit to the theatre. But it only touches the surface of life, and for this reason the incurable townsman, like Johnson, regards it merely as an acquaintance of a rather uncertain temper who can be let in when he is in a good humour and locked out when he is in a bad humour.

But in the country the weather is the stuff of which life is woven. It is politics and society, your livelihood and your intellectual diversion. You study the heavens as the merchant studies his ledger, and watch the change of the wind as anxiously as the politician watches the mood of the public. When I meet Jim Squire and remark that it is a fine day,

or has been a cold night, or looks like rain, it is not a conventional civility. It is the formal opening of the discussion of weighty matters. It involves the prospects of potatoes and the sowing of onions, the blossoms on the trees, the effects of weather on the poultry and the state of the hives. I do not suppose that there is a moment of his life when Jim is unconscious of the weather or indifferent to it, unless it be Sunday. I fancy he does not care what happens to the weather on Sunday. It has passed into other hands, and secular interference would be an impertinence, if not a sin. For he is a stern Sabbatarian, and, wet or fine, goes off in his best clothes to the chapel in the valley, his wife, according to some obscure ritual, always trudging a couple of yards ahead of his heavy figure. He don't hold wi' work on Sundays, not even on his allotment, and if you were to offer to dig the whole day for him he would not take the gift. "I don't hold wi' work on Sundays," he would repeat inflexibly.

And to poor Miss Tonks, who lives in the tumble-down cottage at the other end of the lane, life resolves itself into an unceasing battle with the weather. We call her Poor Miss Tonks because it would be absurd to call her anything else. She is born to misfortune as the sparks fly upward. It is always her sitting of eggs that turns out cocks when she wants hens. If the fox makes a raid on our little hamlet, he goes by an unerring instinct to her poor hen-roost and leaves it an obscene ruin of feathers. The hard frost last winter destroyed her store of

potatoes when everybody else's escaped, and it was her hive that brought the "Isle of Wight" into our midst. Her neighbour, the Widow Walsh, holds that the last was a visitation of Providence. Poor Miss Tonks had had a death in the family—true, it was only a second cousin, but it was "in the family"—and had neglected to tell the bees by tapping on the hive. And of course they died. What else could they do, poor things? Widow Walsh has no patience with people who fly in the face of Providence in this way.

But of all Poor Miss Tonks' afflictions the weather is the most unremittingly malevolent. It is either "smarty hot" or "smarty cold." If it isn't giving her a touch of "brownchitis," or "a blowy feeling all up the back," or making her feel "blubbed all over," it is dripping through her thatched roof, or freezing her pump, or filling her room with smoke, or howling through the crazy tenement where she lives her solitary life. I think she regards the weather as a sort of ogre who haunts the hillside like a highwayman. Sometimes he sleeps, and sometimes he even smiles, but his sleep is short and his smile is a deception. At the bottom he is a terrible and evil-disposed person who gives a poor country woman no end of work, and makes her life a burden.

But to-day warms even her bleak life, and reconciles her to her enemy. When she brings a basket of eggs to the cottage she observes that "it is a bit better to-day." This is the most extreme compliment she ever pays to the weather. And we translate it for her into "Yes, it's just like summer."

In the orchard a beautiful peacock-butterfly flutters out, and under the damson trees there is the authentic note of high summer. For the most part the trees are still as bare as in mid-winter, but the damson trees are white with blossom, and offer the first real feast for the bees which fill the branches with the hum of innumerable wings, like the note of an aerial violin infinitely prolonged. A bumble-bee adds the boom of his double bass to the melody as he goes in his heavy, blustering way from blossom to blossom. He is rather a boorish fellow, but he is as full of the gossip of summer as the peacock-butterfly that comes flitting back across the orchard like a zephyr on wings, or as Old Benjy, who saluted me over the hedge just now with the remark that he didn't recall the like of this for a matter o' seventy year. Yes, seventy year if 'twas a day.

Old Benjy likes weather that reminds him of something about seventy years ago, for his special vanity is his years, and he rarely talks about anything in the memory of this generation. "I be nearer a 'underd," he says, "than seventy," by which I think he means that he is eighty-six. He longs to be able to boast that he is a hundred, and I see no reason why he shouldn't live to do it, for he is an active old boy, still does a good day's gardening, and has come up the lane on this hot day at a nimble speed, carrying his jacket on his arm. He is known to have made his coffin and to keep it in his bedroom; but that is not from any morbid yearning for death. It is, I fancy, a cunning way of warding him off, just as the

rest of us "touch wood" lest evil befall. "It's just like summer," he says. "I remember when I was a boy in the year eighteen-'underd-and-varty-six. . . ."

## ON SUPERSTITIONS

It was inevitable that the fact that a murder has taken place at a house with the number 13 in a street, the letters of whose name number 13, would not pass unnoticed. If we took the last hundred murders that have been committed, I suppose we should find that as many have taken place at No. 6 or No. 7, or any other number you choose, as at No. 13—that the law of averages is as inexorable here as elsewhere. But this consideration does not prevent the world remarking on the fact when No. 13 has its turn. Not that the world believes there is anything in the superstition. It is quite sure it is a mere childish folly, of course. Few of us would refuse to take a house because its number was 13, or decline an invitation to dinner because there were to be 13 at table. But most of us would be just a shade happier if that desirable residence were numbered 11, and not any the less pleased with the dinner if one of the guests contracted a chill that kept him away. We would not confess this little weakness to each other. We might even refuse to admit it to ourselves, but it is there.

That it exists is evident from many irrefutable

signs. There are numerous streets in London, and I daresay in other towns too, in which there is no house numbered 13, and I am told that it is very rare that a bed in a hospital bears that number. The superstition, threadbare though it has worn, is still sufficiently real to enter into the calculations of a discreet landlord in regard to the letting qualities of his house, and into the calculations of a hospital as to the curative properties of a bed. In the latter case general agreement would support the concession to the superstition, idle though that superstition is. Physical recovery is a matter of the mind as well as of the body, and the slightest shadow on the mind may, in a condition of low vitality, retard and even defeat recovery. Florence Nightingale's almost passionate advocacy of flowers in the sick-bedroom was based on the necessity of the creation of a certain state of mind in the patient. There are few more curious revelations in that moving record by M. Duhamel of medical experiences during the war than the case of the man who died of a pimple on his nose. He had been hideously mutilated in battle and was brought into hospital a sheer wreck; but he was slowly patched up and seemed to have been saved when a pimple appeared on his nose. It was nothing in itself, but it was enough to produce a mental state that checked the flickering return of life. It assumed a fantastic importance in the mind of the patient, who, having survived the heavy blows of Fate, died of something less than a pin-prick. It is not difficult to understand that so fragile a hold of life might

yield to the sudden discovery that you were lying in No. 13 bed.

I am not sure that I could go into the witness-box and swear that I am wholly immune to these idle superstitions myself. It is true that of all the buses in London, that numbered 13 chances to be the one that I constantly use, and I do not remember, until now, ever to have associated the superstition with it. And certainly I have never had anything but the most civil treatment from it. It is as well behaved a bus, and as free from unpleasant associations, as any on the road. I would not change its number if I had the power to do so. But there are other circumstances of which I should find it less easy to clear myself of suspicion under cross-examination. I never see a ladder against a house-side without feeling that it is advisable to walk round it rather than under it. I say to myself that this is not homage to a foolish superstition, but a duty to my family. One must think of one's family. The fellow at the top of the ladder may drop anything. He may even drop himself. He may have had too much to drink. He may be a victim of epileptic fits, and epileptic fits, as everyone knows, come on at the most unseasonable times and places. It is a mere measure of ordinary safety to walk round the ladder. No man is justified in inviting danger in order to flaunt his superiority to an idle fancy. Moreover, probably that fancy has its roots in the common-sense fact that a man on a ladder does occasionally drop things. No doubt many of our superstitions have these



commonplace and sensible origins. I imagine, for example, that the Jewish objection to pork as unclean on religious grounds is only due to the fact that in Eastern climates it is unclean on physical grounds.

All the same, I suspect that when I walk round the ladder I am rather glad that I have such respectable and unassailable reasons for doing so. Even if—conscious of this suspicion and ashamed to admit it to myself—I walk under the ladder, I am not quite sure that I have not done so as a kind of negative concession to the superstition. I have challenged it rather than been unconscious of it. There is only one way of dodging the absurd dilemma, and that is to walk through the ladder. This is not easy. In the same way I am sensible of a certain satisfaction when I see the new moon in the open rather than through glass, and over my right shoulder rather than my left. I would not for any consideration arrange these things consciously; but if they happen so I fancy I am better pleased than if they do not. And on these occasions I have even caught my hand—which chanced to be in my pocket at the time—turning over money, a little surreptitiously I thought, but still undeniably turning it. Hands have habits of their own and one can't always be watching them.

But these shadowy reminiscences of antique credulity which we discover in ourselves play no part in the lives of any of us. They belong to a creed outworn. Superstition was disinherited when science revealed the laws of the universe and put man in his place. It was no discredit to be superstitious when

all the functions of Nature were unexplored, and man seemed the plaything of beneficent or sinister forces that he could neither control nor understand, but which held him in the hollow of their hand. He related everything that happened in Nature to his own inexplicable existence, saw his fate in the clouds, his happiness or misery announced in the flight of birds, and referred every phenomenon of life to the soothsayers and oracles. You may read in *Thucydides* of battles being postponed (and lost) because some omen that had no more relation to the event than the falling of a leaf was against it. When *Pompey* was afraid that the Romans would elect *Cato* as prætor he shouted to the Assembly that he heard thunder, and got the whole election postponed for the Romans would never transact business after it had thundered. *Alexander* surrounded himself with fortune-tellers and took counsel with them as a modern ruler takes counsel with his Ministers. Even so great a man as *Cæsar* and so modern and enlightened a man as *Cicero* left their fate to augurs and omens. Sometimes the omens were right and sometimes they were wrong, but whether right or wrong they were equally meaningless. *Cicero* lost his life by trusting to the wisdom of crows. When he was in flight from *Antony* and *Cæsar* *Augustus* he put to sea and might have escaped. But some crows chanced to circle round his vessel and he took the circumstance to be unfavourable to his action, returned to shore and was murdered. Even the farmer of ancient Greece consulted the omens and the

oracles where the farmer to-day is only careful of his manures

I should have liked to have seen Cæsar and I should have liked to have heard Cicero, but on the balance I think we who inherit this later day and who can jest at the shadows that were so real to them have the better end of time. It is pleasant to be about when the light is abroad. We do not know much more of the Power that

Turns the handle of this idle Show

than our forefathers did, but at least we have escaped the grotesque shadows that enveloped them. We do not look for divine guidance in the entrails of animals or the flight of crows, and the House of Commons does not adjourn at a clap of thunder.

### A MAN AND HIS WATCH

I SUPPOSE most people recognised something of themselves in the story, reported in the papers the other day, about the man and his watch. He was hurrying to the station when it occurred to him that he had not got his watch on. So he took his watch out of his pocket to see if he had time to run home and get it. I do not know how the affair continued; but I like to think of him hurrying back, bursting into his house, bouncing upstairs, feeling under his

pillow for the watch, finding it was not there, and creating a fine hubbub in his family, before his little daughter remarks that it is in his pocket. And of course he misses the train. We have all done this sort of thing. A very grave and responsible man who sat in Parliament for many years told me that he went up to his bedroom one evening to change into evening-dress. And at the stage of undressing at which the ceremony of winding up his watch usually occurred, he wound it up, put it under his pillow—and got into bed. Happily before he had fallen asleep he remembered that he had come up, not to undress for bed, but to dress for dinner.

I had an absurd experience of the kind myself not long ago. As everyone knows, there are two tube stations at Oxford Circus, connected underground. I went down the lift at one station intending to catch a train somewhere, and walked along the subway until I came to a lift, into which a crowd of people were hurrying. I suppose my mind was occupied with some affair and the mere habit of joining any crowd that is going into any lift swept me in on the tide. The ticket-collector was too busy to check my ticket, and I duly found myself out in the street again at the place from which I had started, before I realised what I had done. I have the less hesitation in making this confession because few of us can have failed to have some experience of the sort. Most of our actions are as automatic as the functions of walking, or breathing, or masticating our food. They have become so habitual that we do not have to

think about doing them. They perform themselves, as it were, without our help.

If it is your custom to lock up at night and put out the lights, you do so quite mechanically, and if, having locked the sitting-room door and reached the foot of the stairs, your mind chances to wake up and inquire: "Now did you put the lights out?" and sends you back to make sure, you never fail to find that the action has performed itself without any conscious effort on your part. It used to be no uncommon thing for my family to find the front-door securely bolted in broad daylight. I was in those days always the last home at night, and, having opened and closed the door, it was my custom to stoop down and bolt it. If by chance I came in during the morning or afternoon the process was faithfully performed. The habit of bolting the door had become a part of the habit of unlocking it, and it needed a conscious effort of the mind to break the sequence. Or to take another example, anybody can walk asleep down his own stairs quite safely, but if he woke up at the head of the stairs in the dark and began to think how the stairs went on and how many there were, he would not be able to get down them without feeling his way like a blind man.

And most of us, I suppose, know how easy it is to forget the most familiar name when the mind wakes up and urgently asks for it. You are talking, let us say, to Blessington when up comes Whorlow. You know Whorlow as well as you know your own shadow, and if you met him in the street in the

ordinary way his name would be on your tongue as naturally as your own. But now your mind interferes. It demands Whorlow's name for the purposes of introduction on the spot—instantly. The passive habit of thinking Whorlow when you see Whorlow vanishes. Your active thought becomes engaged. It rushes round in search of his name, and cannot find it, and you end by mumbling something unintelligible. And probably Whorlow, who is a little sensitive about his name, feels that you have deliberately slighted him.

It is not difficult to credit the stories of the people who forget their own names or their own telephone number. These things have been committed to the automatic workings of the mind. Our active thought is not concerned with them, and when we consciously think about them they escape. As Samuel Butler says, we don't know a thing until we have ceased to know that we know it. If we ask ourselves whether we know it, we are on the way to being lost. He takes the case of the accomplished pianist who rattles off a nocturne of Chopin or an impromptu of Schubert without a check or a mistake. The habit of the thing acquired by infinite practice carries him on like the wind. But let him be stopped in mid-flight, as it were, and then begin to think about the notes, and he will flounder and hesitate until the current of habit seizes him again and sweeps him to the close. Anyone can provide similar illustrations out of his own experience. I can spell Philippi as well as most if I take it at a rush, but if I begin by asking myself how to spell it, I fancy I should get entangled in the "l's" and "p's."

In the case of the man and his watch, we see this conflict of the active and passive mind in its most elementary form. His conscious thought is that he has forgotten his watch and that there is little time to spare to get it. Is there enough time? In comes habit and takes his watch out of his pocket to tell him how long it is before the train starts. The action is so automatic that he does not associate it with the subject of his disquietude. And there he stands, looking at his watch to see if he has time to go home and get it—a perpetual joke which we can all enjoy, none the less, perhaps all the more, because we suspect that we all stand there with him.

### ON SMILES

IF I were to be born into this world again and had the choice of my endowments I should arrange very carefully about my smile. There is nothing so irresistible as the right sort of smile. It is better than the silver spoon in the mouth. It will carry you anywhere and win you anything, including the silver spoon. It disarms your enemies and makes them forget that they have a grudge against you. "I have a great many reasons for disliking you," said a well-known public man to a friend of mine the other day, "but when I am with you I can never remember what they are." It was the flash of sunshine that did for him. He could not preserve his hostility in the

presence of the other's disarming smile and gay good humour. He just yielded up his sword and sunned himself in the pleasant weather that the other carried with him like an atmosphere.

At the Bar, of course, a pleasant address is worth a fortune. I suppose there has been no more successful figure in the law courts in our time than Rufus Isaacs, but I fancy he won as many of his victories by the debonair smile with which he irradiated the courts as by his law. You could see the judge on the bench and the jury in the box basking in the warmth that he shed around him. The weather might be as harsh as it liked outside; but here the sky was clear and the sun was shining genially. It was a fine day and the only blot on the landscape was the unhappy counsel for the other side, who thumped the table and got red in the face as he saw his client's case melting away like snow before a south wind.

And among politicians it is notorious that a popular smile is the shortest cut to the great heart of democracy. In an estimate of the qualities that have contributed to Mr. Lloyd George's amazing success a high place would have to be given to the twinkling smile, so merry and mischievous, so engagingly frank and so essentially secret and calculating, with which, by the help of the photographer, he has irradiated his generation. If Mr. Asquith had learned how to smile for public consumption, the history of English politics, and even of the world, would have been vastly different; but Mr. Asquith's smile is private and intellectual and has no pictorial value, and I doubt



whether anyone ever heard him laugh outright. He was born without the chief equipment of the politician in a democratic age. No one knew the value of that equipment more than Theodore Roosevelt. He was the most idolised public man America has produced for half a century, and he owed his popularity more to his enormous smile than to any other quality. It was like a baron of beef. You could cut and come again. There was no end to it. It seemed to stretch across the Continent from the Atlantic to the Pacific, and when it burst into laughter it shook the land like a merry earthquake. There was not much behind the smile, but it was the genuine article, the expression of a companionable spirit and a healthy enjoyment of life, and it knocked the Americans "all of a heap." Woodrow Wilson's smile was almost as spacious as Roosevelt's, but it was less infectious, for it was thoughtful and reflective; came from the mind rather than the feelings, and never burst into laughter. It was the smile of the schoolmaster, while Roosevelt's was the smile of the uproarious schoolboy who was having no end of "a bully time."

Really first-rate smiles are rare. For the most part our smiles add little to our self-expression. If we are dull, they are dull. If we are sinister, they are only a little more sinister. If we are smug, they only emphasise our smugness. If, like the Lord High Everything Else, we were born sneering, our smile is apt to be a sneer, too. If we are terrible, like Swift, we shall have his "terrible smile." Only rarely do we light upon the smile that is a revelation. Harry Lauder's

smile is like a national institution or a natural element. It is plentiful enough to fill the world. It is a continual and abundant feast that requires neither words nor chorus, and when he laughs you can no more help feeling happy than he can. Lord Balfour's smile is famous in another way. It has the untroubled sweetness of a child's, and there are few who can resist its charm; but it is elusive and seems too much like a mask that has little to do with the real man. You feel that he would send you to the scaffold with the same seraphic sweetness with which he would pass you the sugar. It is not an emanation of the man like that abundant smile, at once good-humoured and sardonic, with which Mr. Birrell sets the company aglow.

The most memorable smiles are those which have the quality of the unexpected. A smile that is habitual rarely pleases, for it suggests policy, and the essence of a smile is its spontaneity and lack of deliberation. Archbishop Temple said he hated people who were always smiling, and then, looking across the luncheon table at the vicar who had been doing his best to ingratiate himself with the terrible prelate, added: "Look at the vicar there—*he's* always smiling." It was a cruel affront, but the smile that has the quality of an artifice is hard to bear. It was so in the case of Mrs. Barbauld, of whom it was said that she wore such an habitual smile that it made your face ache to look at her. One would almost prefer the other melancholy extreme, illustrated by that gloomy fanatic, Philip II., who is said to have laughed only

once in his life, and that on receiving the merry news of the massacre of St. Bartholomew. The smiles that dwell in the mind most are those that break suddenly like sunshine from unexpected places. That was the quality of the curiously wistful smile that played over the ascetic features of Lord Morley in conversation. You could forgive all his asperities when he smiled. But the most delightful example of the unexpected smile that I know is that of the pianist Frederic Lamond. The intensity of his countenance forbids the suggestion of a smile, and at the piano he seems to descend into unfathomable depths of gravity and spiritual remoteness. But when the piece is over and the house breaks out into thunders of applause, he emerges from the depths with a smile that suggests that the Land of Beulah has broken on his sight. It is so sudden a transition that you almost seem to catch a glimpse of the Land of Beulah yourself.

But it is no use for those of us who have only humdrum smiles to attempt to set up a smile that is an incantation. Smiles, like poets, are born, not made. If they are made, they are not smiles, but grimaces, and convict us on the spot. They are simply an attempt to circulate false news. There is no remedy for us of the negligible smile, but to be born again and to be born different, not outside but within, for the smile is only the publication of the inward spirit.

## PLANTING A SPINNEY

THE idea of planting a spinney arose out of the necessity of finding a name for the cottage. It is difficult to find a name for anything, from a baby to a book, but it is most difficult of all to find a name for a house. At least so we found it. Jane wanted "The Knoll," and somebody else, with a taste for Hardy, wanted "The Knap," and someone else, as a tribute to Meredith (and in view of the fact that the upland we had built on was a famous place for skylarks) wanted "Lark Uprising" (what would the postman have thought?), and another wanted "Windy Gap," and so on, and amid the multitude of suggestions the cottage seemed as though it would lose its youth and grow old without any name at all.

Then one day someone said "The Spinney," and in sheer desperation everyone else said, "Why, of course, 'The Spinney.' Perfect. The very thing." The only objection that was made was that there was no spinney. But the good name could not be sacrificed to so negligible a consideration. Moreover, what had we been about to forget to plant so desirable a thing as a spinney? There, below the house, just out of the line of view so as not to blot out the landscape of four counties, was the very spot, and in the garden there were plenty of trees—pine, spruce, chestnut, beech and lime—of twelve or fifteen years' growth ready to hand. It would have been safer and

simpler to have set young saplings, but that would not have satisfied the elders. It would have been starting a spinney for another generation to enjoy, and we wanted a spinney that we could sit under ourselves.

If you plant saplings, I think you ought to do it in your youth so that you and the trees can grow to maturity and age together. I often regret that I did not plant an acorn from that glorious tree, the Queen Elizabeth's oak at Chenies, when I was young. It would have been a stalwart fellow by this time with a comfortable shade on summer days. But now, no. I should be too heavily handicapped in the race, and the young oak just starting on its prodigious career would mock my little span. One ought not, of course, to be sentimental over such things, but if you love trees you cannot help it. Witness that story in Tacitus of the noble Roman who owned the garden of Lucullus and who, being sentenced to be burned in his garden, asked permission the night before his execution to go and choose the place for the funeral pyre in order that the flames which consumed him should spare the trees he loved. That is a fine legend by which to be remembered for two thousand years.

I was told the other day a pleasant fact about Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman which will endear him still more to some and make him appear, perhaps, absurd to others. When he went from London to his estate of Belmont in Scotland, it was his practice to walk round his park and take off his hat to the

trees he loved most. If Sir Henry had been given to irony, it might be supposed that the gesture was intended as a compliment on the company he had left behind at Westminster. "The more I see of men," he might have meant, adapting Pascal's famous phrase, "the better I like trees." But I do not fancy there was any anger with men in his greeting. There was nothing of the misanthrope in that shrewd and companionable man. He was a good hater, and had as acute a sense of character as any man of his time. He knew a crook or a humbug by instinct, and anything fraudulent or shoddy withered in his presence; but an honest, plain man was always at home with him.

He saluted his favourite trees in the spirit in which Xerxes, when passing with his army through Lydia, decorated with golden ornaments a plane tree of extraordinary beauty, and left a warrior from the Immortal Band to be its special guard, as you may read in Herodotus. He saluted them because he loved them, and no one who has the spirit of the woodlands in him will think the action odd or even fanciful. It has never occurred to me to go about the woods taking off my hat to the kings of the forest, but that only shows that I have less imagination and less chivalry than he had. I am not sure I shall not do so in future. It is the least courtesy I can offer them for all the pleasure they have given me in life, and the action will seem reasonable enough to anyone who has witnessed those wonderful experiments of Professor Bhose which reveal the

inner life of the tree with such thrilling suggestions of consciousness and emotion.

It is not possible to live much among trees without experiencing a subtle sense of comradeship with them. Our intimacy may not go so far as that of Giles Winterbourn, in *The Woodlanders*, who could tell what sort of trees he was passing in the dark by the sound of the wind in the branches—but without that erudition it can create an affection almost personal, not unlike that we feel for those quiet companions of whom we have not thought much, perhaps, until we find that their simple constancy and friendliness had made the atmosphere and sunshine in which we moved.

I confess that when I walk through the woods that crown the hills behind the cottage, and see the great boles of the noblest of the beeches marked for felling, I feel very much as when I hear bad news of an old friend. That those glorious fellows, whom I have seen clothing themselves with green in the spring and with gold in the autumn, should be brought low and split into fragments to make chairs and tables seems a sacrilege. It is an unpractical sentiment, of course, and I daresay if I owned the trees I should cut them down, too. So I am glad I don't own them, and can just love them and lament them.

I should, however, find it hard to cut down beech trees of all trees, for after many affairs of the heart with trees, my affections have settled finally on them as the pride of our English woodlands. With what

stateliness they spring from the ground, how noble their shade, how exquisite the green of their leaves in spring, how rich the gold of autumn, what a glowing carpet they spread for us in winter! If I go to Epping Forest it is to see the grand patriarchs of the tribe who are gathered together in solemn conclave in Monk's Wood, and if I place Buckinghamshire high among the counties, it is because there you will find a more abundant wealth of beeches than anywhere else in the land.

But I am no narrow sectarian about trees. If I put the beech first, I worship at many shrines. When I go to Chenies it is to pay my devotions to the Duke of Bedford's oaks, and especially the aforesaid Queen Elizabeth's oak, which still strews the greensward with acorns, though in its ancient trunk, hollowed by the centuries, you could seat a tolerably large tea-party. And who would go to Shere without a visit to those stalwart Spanish chestnuts that are the glory of the Duke of Northumberland's park? It is worth a journey to Salisbury, not merely to see the spire and Stonehenge, but to make the acquaintance of those magnificent cedars in Wilton Park. There is an elm at Nuneham that I go to see much as I go to see a venerable relative, and there is a wonderful yew-tree in the churchyard of Tidworth in Surrey that is better worth a pilgrimage than many a cathedral.

But to return to the spinney. We began our adventure a year ago, between the months of November and February, which are the limits within which



transplanting can be done. A dozen spruce, two pines, a sycamore and two limes, all standing ten to a dozen feet in their boots, so to speak, were, with enormous gruntings, heavings and perspirations, borne to the chosen spot, and there placed in new-dug holes, earthed up, wired in position, and left to weather the storms. The handy-man shook his head over the operation—"didn't know but what they warn't too big to shift, but happen some on 'em would live." All through the spring and summer I watched those trees struggling for life, like a doctor walking the wards of a hospital and feeling the pulses of his patients. Month by month the spruces flickered on. The fairest of them all was the first to give up the ghost definitely, and then three others followed. It was August before any shoots of new foliage began to appear, and then one by one the remainder put forth tiny buds of life, the last sending out his faint signal of spring as late as October. "Ain't done so bad," said the handy-man, scratching his head to help him to a right judgment.

To-day with more heavings and gruntings the handy-man and I have transplanted another bunch of pines a good fifteen feet in height to the spinney, and for months to come I shall walk the wood again to catch signs of life in my new patients. Meanwhile, in order to provide for the future we have planted young saplings among the big trees, and altogether my spinney, I think, makes a handsome show. I have just had a walk along the lane below to view it as a stranger might, and, speaking as a stranger,

I remarked to myself that that was a nice little spinney beside the cottage on the hill, and when I came to the gate I, still as a stranger, was struck by the appropriateness of the name. I think that that spinney will be my memorial to the countryside, and I want no better. There is no pleasanter thing to be remembered by than trees. They are better than battles or books, for they do not record our passions, our ambitions, or our contentions. They record only that we once passed this way and loved the friendliness of the woods.

## OUR NEIGHBOUR THE MOON

JANE observed just now that she was sure the days were drawing out. We laughed, as we were expected to, at the immemorial remark, but we cheerfully agreed that there was truth in it. We looked at our watches. It was past four and the landscape of half a dozen counties still lay, darkening but visible from the hillside, while in the garden the thrushes were singing as though it were a summer evening. The moon, which had been faintly visible long before the sun had set, was beginning to take up "the wondrous tale." It was that bewitching moment of the day when the two luminaries are about equally-matched and the light of the moon filters through the light of the day and a new scheme of shadows begins to take shape about you as you walk.

If I were asked to name the chief difference between living in town (as I used to do) and living in the country (as I now chiefly do), I think I should say that it consisted in the place which the moon fills in our everyday life, especially of course in the dark season of the year. It might almost be said that we do not discover the moon until we live in the country. In town it is only another and a rather larger lamp hung aloft the street. We do not need it to light us on our way and are indifferent to its coming and going. If it shines, well; if it does not shine, no matter. We go about our business in either case, and do not consult the calendar to know whether such-and-such a night will be light enough to go to the theatre or to dinner with Aunt Anne at Kensington, as the case may be. Nothing but fog can interfere with these amenities and the calendar is uninformed as to the vagaries of the fog.

But in the country the moon is not an unconsidered and casual visitor whose movements are of such little account that we do not trouble to study them. It is, on the contrary, the most important and most discussed neighbour we have. In town we do not think of the moon in neighbourly terms. It is something remote and foreign, that does not come within the scope of our system. We should miss the lamp across the road that sends a friendly ray through our window-curtains all night, and if we went down to Piccadilly Circus one evening and did not see the coloured signs twinkling on the shop-fronts we should feel lonely and bereaved. But if the moon did not

turn up one evening according to plan, hardly one Londoner in a thousand would notice the fact. He would read about it in the newspapers next day and talk about it coming up to the City in the tube, but he would not have discovered the fact himself or have been sensible of any loss.

It is otherwise with us country bumpkins. The neighbourliness of the moon and of the stars is one of the alleviations of our solitude. We have no street lamps or pretty coloured sky-signs to look at, and so we look at the Great Bear and Orion, the Sickle and the Pleiades, trace out Cassiopeia's chair and watch to see Sirius come up over the hilltop like a messenger bearing thrilling tidings. We know they are far off, but there is nothing between us, and intimacy seems to make them curiously near and friendly. A cloudy night that blots out the stars is as gloomy an experience for us as an accident at the electric power-house that puts out the street lights and plunges the house in darkness is to the dweller in Hampstead or Clapham.

But it is the moon that is our most precious neighbour. Its phases are as much a part of the practical mechanism of life as the winding-up of the clock, and the hour of its rising and setting regulates our comings and goings. If it failed to turn up one night all the countryside would know about it. There would be a universal hue-and-cry, and no one would sleep in his bed for watching. When the sickle of the new moon appears in the sunset sky the cheerful nights set in. There is no need

to light the lantern if we want to go to the wood-shed or to the chicken-run at the end of the garden to investigate some unfamiliar sound that proceeds from thence. If there is anything contemplated at the village schoolroom down in the valley it is fixed for an evening when the moon is high to light us by road or field-path; and when the moon is near the full we reach the high festival of our country nights. Then, no matter how busy the day has been or how comfortable the fireside is, the call of our neighbour the moon to come out and see the magic he can throw over the landscape is irresistible.

It is irresistible now. While I have been writing, the moon has been gathering power. The night is clear and full of stars. There is the glisten of frost on the grass. The wind has fallen and the plain that glimmers below in the moonlight is soundless. It would be a sin not to be abroad on such a night. Moreover Ben and Jeff need a run before settling down for sleep. They love the moonlight too, not for its poetry, but for its aid in the ceaseless but ever unrewarded task of exploring rabbit-holes and other futile hints of sports. "Come, Ben! Come, Jeff! . . . Walk."

## ON SAYING "PLEASE"

THE young lift-man in a City office who threw a passenger out of his lift the other morning and was fined for the offence was undoubtedly in the wrong. It was a question of "Please." The complainant, entering the lift, said, "Top." The lift-man demanded, "Top, please," and this concession being refused he not only declined to comply with the instruction, but hurled the passenger out of the lift. This, of course, was carrying a comment on manners too far. Discourtesy is not a legal offence, and it does not excuse assault and battery. If a burglar breaks into my house and I knock him down, the law will acquit me, and if I am physically assaulted, it will permit me to retaliate with reasonable violence. It does this because the burglar and my assailant have broken quite definite commands of the law. But no legal system could attempt to legislate against bad manners, or could sanction the use of violence against something which it does not itself recognise as a legally punishable offence. And whatever our sympathy with the lift-man, we must admit that the law is reasonable. It would never do if we were at liberty to box people's ears because we did not like their behaviour, or the tone of their voices, or the scowl on their faces. Our fists would never be idle, and the gutters of the City would run with blood all day.

I may be as uncivil as I please and the law will

protect me against violent retaliation. I may be haughty or boorish and there is no penalty to pay except the penalty of being written down an ill-mannered fellow. The law does not compel me to say "Please" or to attune my voice to other people's sensibilities any more than it says that I shall not wax my moustache or dye my hair or wear ringlets down my back. It does not recognise the laceration of our feelings as a case for compensation. There is no allowance for moral and intellectual damages in these matters.

This does not mean that the damages are negligible. It is probable that the lift-man was much more acutely hurt by what he regarded as a slur upon his social standing than he would have been if he had had a kick on the shins, for which he could have got legal redress. The pain of a kick on the shins soon passes away, but the pain of a wound to our self-respect or our vanity may poison a whole day. I can imagine that lift-man, denied the relief of throwing the author of his wound out of the lift, brooding over the insult by the hour, and visiting it on his wife in the evening as the only way of restoring his equilibrium. For there are few things more catching than bad temper and bad manners. When Sir Anthony Absolute bullied Captain Absolute, the latter went out and bullied his man Fag, whereupon Fag went downstairs and kicked the page-boy. Probably the man who said "Top" to the lift-man was really only getting back on his employer who had not said "Good morning" to him because he himself

had been henpecked at breakfast by his wife, to whom the cook had been insolent because the housemaid had "answered her back." We infect the world with our ill-humours. Bad manners probably do more to poison the stream of the general life than all the crimes in the calendar. For one wife who gets a black eye from an otherwise good-natured husband there are a hundred who live a life of martyrdom under the shadow of a morose temper. But all the same the law cannot become the guardian of our private manners. No Decalogue could cover the vast area of offences and no court could administer a law which governed our social civilities, our speech, the tilt of our eyebrows and all our moods and manners.

But though we are bound to endorse the verdict against the lift-man, most people will have a certain sympathy with him. While it is true that there is no law that compels us to say "Please," there is a social practice much older and more sacred than any law which enjoins us to be civil. And the first requirement of civility is that we should acknowledge a service. "Please" and "Thank you" are the small change with which we pay our way as social beings. They are the little courtesies by which we keep the machine of life oiled and running sweetly. They put our intercourse upon the basis of a friendly co-operation, an easy give-and-take, instead of on the basis of superiors dictating to inferiors. It is a very vulgar mind that would wish to command where he can have the service for asking, and have it with willingness and good-feeling instead of resentment.



I should like to "feature" in this connection my friend, the polite conductor. By this discriminating title I do not intend to suggest a rebuke to conductors generally. On the contrary, I am disposed to think that there are few classes of men who come through the ordeal of a very trying calling better than bus conductors do. Here and there you will meet an unpleasant specimen who regards the passengers as his natural enemies—as creatures whose chief purpose on the bus is to cheat him, and who can only be kept reasonably honest by a loud voice and an aggressive manner. But this type is rare—rarer than it used to be. I fancy the public owes much to the Underground Railway Company, which also runs the buses, for insisting on a certain standard of civility in its servants, and taking care that that standard is observed. In doing this it not only makes things pleasant for the travelling public, but performs an important social service.

It is not, therefore, with any feeling of unfriendliness to conductors as a class that I pay a tribute to a particular member of that class. I first became conscious of his existence one day when I jumped on to a bus and found that I had left home without any money in my pocket. Everyone has had the experience and knows the feeling, the mixed feeling, which the discovery arouses. You are annoyed because you look like a fool at the best, and like a knave at the worst. You would not be at all surprised if the conductor eyed you coldly as much as to say, "Yes, I know that stale old trick. Now then, off you

get." And even if the conductor is a good fellow and lets you down easily, you are faced with the necessity of going back, and the inconvenience, perhaps, of missing your train or your engagement.

Having searched my pockets in vain for stray coppers, and having found I was utterly penniless, I told the conductor with as honest a face as I could assume that I couldn't pay the fare, and must go back for money. "Oh, you needn't get off: that's all right," said he. "All right?" said I, "but I haven't a copper on me." "Oh, I'll book you through," he replied. "Where d'ye want to go?" and he handled his bundle of tickets with the air of a man who was prepared to give me a ticket for anywhere from the Bank to Hong-Kong. I said it was very kind of him, and told him where I wanted to go, and as he gave me the ticket I said, "But where shall I send the fare?" "Oh, you'll see me some day all right," he said cheerfully, as he turned to go. And then, luckily, my fingers, still wandering in the corners of my pockets, lighted on a shilling, and the account was squared. But that fact did not lessen the glow of pleasure which so good-natured an action had given me.

A few days after my most sensitive toe was trampled on rather heavily as I sat reading on the top of a bus. I looked up with some anger and more agony, and saw my friend of the cheerful countenance. "Sorry, sir," he said. "I know these are heavy boots. Got 'em because my own feet get trod on so much, and now I'm treading on

other people's. Hope I didn't hurt you, sir." He had hurt me but he was so nice about it that I assured him he hadn't. After this I began to observe him whenever I boarded his bus, and found a curious pleasure in the constant good-nature of his bearing. He seemed to have an inexhaustible fund of patience and a gift for making his passengers comfortable. I noticed that if it was raining he would run up the stairs to give someone the tip that there was "room inside." With old people he was as considerate as a son, and with children as solicitous as a father. He had evidently a peculiarly warm place in his heart for young people, and always indulged in some merry jest with them. If he had a blind man on board it was not enough to set him down safely on the pavement. He would call to Bill in front to wait while he took him across the road or round the corner, or otherwise safely on his way. In short, I found that he irradiated such an atmosphere of good-temper and kindness that a journey with him was a lesson in natural courtesy and good manners.

What struck me particularly was the ease with which he got through his work. If bad manners are infectious, so also are good manners. If we encounter incivility most of us are apt to become uncivil, but it is an unusually uncouth person who can be disagreeable with sunny people. It is with manners as with the weather. "Nothing clears up my spirits like a fine day," said Keats, and a cheerful person descends on even the gloomiest of us with something of the benediction of a fine day. And so it was always fine

weather on the polite conductor's bus, and his own civility, his conciliatory address and good-humoured bearing, infected his passengers. In lightening their spirits he lightened his own task. His gaiety was not a wasteful luxury, but a sound investment.

I have missed him from my bus route of late; but I hope that only means that he has carried his sunshine on to another road. It cannot be too widely diffused in a rather drab world. And I make no apologies for writing a panegyric on an unknown bus conductor. If Wordsworth could gather lessons of wisdom from the poor leech-gatherer "on the lonely moor," I see no reason why lesser people should not take lessons in conduct from one who shows how a very modest calling may be dignified by good-temper and kindly feeling.

It is a matter of general agreement that the war has had a chilling effect upon those little every-day civilities of behaviour that sweeten the general air. We must get those civilities back if we are to make life kindly and tolerable for each other. We cannot get them back by invoking the law. The policeman is a necessary symbol and the law is a necessary institution for a society that is still somewhat lower than the angels. But the law can only protect us against material attack. Nor will the lift-man's way of meeting moral affront by physical violence help us to restore the civilities. I suggest to him that he would have had a more subtle and effective revenge if he had treated the gentleman who would not say "Please" with elaborate politeness. He would have

had the victory, not only over the boor, but over himself, and that is the victory that counts. The polite man may lose the material advantage, but he always has the spiritual victory. I commend to the lift-man a story of Chesterfield. In his time the London streets were without the pavements of to-day, and the man who "took the wall" had the drier footing. "I never give the wall to a scoundrel," said a man who met Chesterfield one day in the street. "I always do," said Chesterfield, stepping with a bow into the road. I hope the lift-man will agree that his revenge was much more sweet than if he had flung the fellow into the mud.

### THE CULT OF THE KNIFE AND FORK

I WAS walking in the Chiltern Hills with a friend not long ago when we turned into the inn at Chenies for lunch. There were only two people in the dining-room—a man, and, I take it, his wife, who were sitting at a table laden with a cold roast of beef, vegetables, pickles, cheese and bread, and large tankards of beer. The man was a hefty person with red hair, a red face, and a "fair round belly." He took no notice of our entrance, and he took no notice of the timid little woman in front of him. He gave his undivided attention to his knife and fork and the joint before him. He cut and came again with the steady gravity of a man who took his

victuals seriously and had no time for frivolous talk. When at last the fury of his appetite abated, he took a last deep draught from the tankard, drew his napkin across his mouth, stretched himself, and, speaking for the first time to the timid little woman in front of him, said:

"Well, we'd better be getting on if we're going to catch that train to Rickmansworth" (two stations or so off).

"But what do we want to stop at Rickmansworth for?" ventured the timid little woman.

"What do we want to stop at Rickmansworth for?" repeated the man in a tone in which astonishment and indignation struggled for mastery. "*Well, I suppose we've got to have tea?*"

He spoke as though the deepest feelings of his nature had been wounded. He was having a day's outing in the country, and here was this insensible woman before him who actually wanted to know what they were going to Rickmansworth for. What had they come out for if it was not to have lunch at Chenies *and* tea at Rickmansworth? In his mind Chenies lived as a place where you got lashings of cold beef and pickles, washed down with good ale, at the inn, and Rickmansworth as a place where you called to have tea and eggs and bread and butter and jam. I do not speak disrespectfully of those to whom the memory of good food hangs like a halo round a place. Hazlitt remembered Llangollen, not merely because he first read the *New Elôise* there, but because he read it to the accompaniment of a

bottle of sherry and a cold chicken. And again: "I remember the leg of Welsh mutton and the turnips that day had the finest flavour imaginable," he says, when referring to his first meeting with Coleridge.

Indeed, not the least of Hazlitt's charms is his hearty delight in the table. His adventures have a trick of ending in the cheerful music of knife and fork. Thus he tells how in his youthful days when he was trying to live by art he painted a portrait of a Manchester manufacturer, and being very hungry, having lived for the past fortnight chiefly on coffee, he slurred over the painting of his sitter's coat in order that he might hear the five guineas reward jingling in his pocket. Then, the guineas secure, he hurried to the market-place and dined on sausages and mashed potatoes, "a noble dish for strong stomachs; and while they were getting ready and I could hear them hissing in the pan, I read a volume of *Gil Blas* containing the account of the fair Aurora."

But with all the gusto of these and many similar allusions to food, it will be observed that the pleasures of eating were incidental and not primary. It was the associations of the food that made it memorable. The sherry and the chicken, like Llangollen itself, were irradiated by the spirit of Rousseau, and the Welsh mutton and the turnips lingered on the palate of memory with the impression of Coleridge's astonishing eloquence. It was the intellectual zest of the occasion that added a touch of poetry to the food. The Welsh mutton caught the rapture of

the prophet, the sherry glowed with the fire of new thought, and the lissing of the sausages and mash in the pan were mingled with the tale of the fair Aurora. That is the way to dignify the remembrance of our creature comforts. It is no dishonour even to the Finsteraarhorn to remember the noble bowl of steaming hot soup that you had in the hut when the climb was done, and many a fine walk is rounded off in retrospect by the fare that awaited us at the inn. Even bread and cheese and beer may be suffused with the glory of a great adventure, and Mr. George Saintsbury, who has as much zest over his food as Hazlitt had, will grow lyrical even about sandwiches, taken to the right accompaniment of time and place.

But to remember Chenies for its beef and pickles is to exalt beef and pickles to too high a place in our affections. I have known men who have travelled much and who seem to have brought nothing back from their travels but menu cards. Such a one was coming up the other day from Devonshire, whither he had been for a holiday. I know no finer country for a holiday, nor one better worth growing dithyrambic about. After much travelling and many affairs of the heart with the English counties I think my verdict has gone finally to Devonshire. Where shall we find such colour, such moorlands, such a variety of coast-line, so warm and generous a feeling about Nature and man? If I had a second innings on earth and had my choice of birthplace, I think I should choose to be born a Devon man. So I think would that man in the railway-carriage, but for other



reasons than mine. He was an amiable and gossipy man who babbled to the company about his holiday experiences. He had been to many places on the South Devon coast, but so far as one could gather he had been eating all the time. Every place recalled some meal. There was Dartmouth, for example. If you ever went to Dartmouth be sure to go to such-and-such a tea-shop. Top-hole it was. Best place for tea in the town. You could have what they called "a light tea," and a very nice tea it was, with home-made jam and Devonshire cream. His face glowed with the succulent thought. *Or* you could have a heavy tea, a sort of a high tea, the constituents of which he recited with great precision, as a man might particularise his strokes at golf or his hand at cards or the mountains he had climbed.

Then there was Teignmouth. He went there and it was a fine place. And if you ever went to Teignmouth he had one piece of advice to give. Don't miss having lunch at the "Boar's Head" or some such place. No end of a lunch. And reasonable too. Not cheap, mind you. He was not a person who believed in cheapness. But the quality! And with this introduction he travelled over the menu, the record of which occupied quite a substantial part of the journey to London. After this he continued the itinerary of his travels in quest of meals. He went up the Teign to Newton Abbot, and there or thereabouts he struck a most wonderful cockle tea. The cockles, it seemed, came out of the river, and it was his solid conviction that Newton Abbot was a place

very well worth visiting if it was only to know what cockles could be like when they came fresh out of the water, and were taken to the accompaniment of the right sort of tea.

And so he babbled on about the places he had been to and the food he had eaten in them until one might have thought that Devonshire was a land strewn with tea-shops and restaurants. I offer him as a cautionary tale for those who take the cult of the knife and fork a thought too seriously.

### THE SEVENTH LAP

OF course sixty is not the respectable age it used to be. What with cleaner habits, good drainage, more exercise, and less alcohol, we are increasing the average duration of life so much that soon nobody will be really venerable who is not within sight of his century. It is less than twenty years since old age pensions were established, but in that time the prospect of the average life has extended by some five years. Since the eighteenth century, when people used to die of port and old age at forty-five, we have put on a good twenty or twenty-five years. Instead of being middle-aged at thirty we are in our prime at fifty, and the Psalmist's limit of seventy has become out of date. It is with life as with cricket. We do not think much of "centuries" to-day. Good wickets

make long scores and healthy conditions make long lives.

But although sixty is not what it was, it is a substantial total, and if ever it is decent to talk of one's self it is when one has set out on one's seventh lap. By this time the adventure of life has taken shape and we begin to look at the balance sheet as an accomplished fact rather than as the glowing prospectus of youth. The ledger is pretty full and its future entries are not likely to seriously affect the total. We know something of the best and worst of things, and if we hope less I think we fear less. The pendulum does not swing in the old violent way, and we have got a certain equipoise, a repose that makes the pulse of things more even. Perhaps it is only the slowing down of the physical engine. Perhaps it is the mellowing influence of years and experience. We have had so many crises that seemed the end of all things that we have come to take them a little lightly and indifferently, and to carry our burden more cavalierly. We have learned that things are rarely quite as bad as they seem, and equally rarely quite as good. There is a big margin of error in all our expectations, and the realised surplus is never like what we looked for. The irony of circumstance plays the dickens with our calculations. When I look back I can hardly recall a disaster which did not in the end turn out to be something quite different from what I thought it would be at the time, or a piece of good fortune which did not discover flaws in the enjoyment. It is, I think, a common experience that when we are a little blown

up with pride about anything there is a humiliation waiting for us round the corner that will administer a salutary prick to our self-esteem. And on the other hand we not seldom discover that the worst tumble has the stimulating qualities of a pick-me-up. "You never can tell," as Shaw's incomparable waiter says.

It is this experience of the incalculableness of things that makes us at sixty rather less excitable than we used to be—rather more disposed to take things without panic and without ecstasy. We refuse to be browbeaten and terrorised by that great bogey the future, for we have discovered the meaning of the sensible man who observed, "I have had many sore troubles in my life—but most of them never happened." At sixty I think a good many of us can say the same. We find that we have often made ourselves uncommonly miserable in the present because of our fears that something would happen which generally did not happen. And so we have learned to take shorter views and to accept things as they come without too much alarm as to what they will lead to. The poet who dies at thirty, "looks before and after and pines for what is not," but the poet who lives tranquilly to eighty-four offers more sober counsel:

The Present, the Present is all thou hast  
For thy sure possessing—  
Like the patriarch's angel, hold it fast  
Till it gives its blessing.

In becoming less anxious I think we elderly people become a trifle more humble and more patient. I do

not necessarily mean in our personal bearing. I know one person of sixty who can be as impatient in that relation as any eager youth of twenty. I mean in our general attitude to life. We realise that our responsibility for the universe is not quite so oppressive and individual as we used to think it was. There was a time when the wrong-headedness of the world afflicted us like a personal misery. It was rushing to ruin regardless of that enormous wisdom of which we were so plainly possessed, and we rather felt as an engine-driver must feel who has allowed his train to be wrecked. We take a more modest view of ourselves now, and in becoming the fly on the wheel of things instead of the wheel itself, we find that being less important and necessary has its compensations. It enables us to be more happy. We see the humour and the meaning of that fable of the frog who swelled itself to imitate the ox and said, "When I burst the ox will still remain." It is a great thing to remember that the ox will still go on browsing, whatever happens to us.

And in worrying less about how the world wags, we tend, I think, to find more pleasure in certain things that we can enjoy without any sense that we are responsible for them, or that we can influence without annoyance to ourselves or others. We cultivate our garden, an occupation which grows more absorbing as we grow more elderly, and we become more interested in the pageant of nature than in the pantomime of man. I have a friend who has planted some saplings to take off the edge of the north wind

from his house, and though he is eighty-four he is as keen in watching and tending their growth as if he expected to live to enjoy their protection. And then there is the world of books, which could never be really enjoyed while the heat of the battle was on, but which is now ours to explore at leisure. There are all the old friendships that we have made in books to revive, and new friendships that we have put off making to invoke. It was Mr. Birrell who, when asked what he would do when he retired, said he would settle down and "really read Boswell." At sixty one feels like that. The harness that has hitched us to the cart of things is loosening, and the bit and the curb are beginning to relax. We have done our share of the collar-work, and can leave others to do theirs. We can look for our slippers and search the shelves for a book of the right vintage, or take out the chessmen or potter about in the garden. I find there are heaps of pleasant things to do at sixty.

THE END

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